AY'S SCIENCE FICTION — TOMORROW'S FACT • MAY 25c

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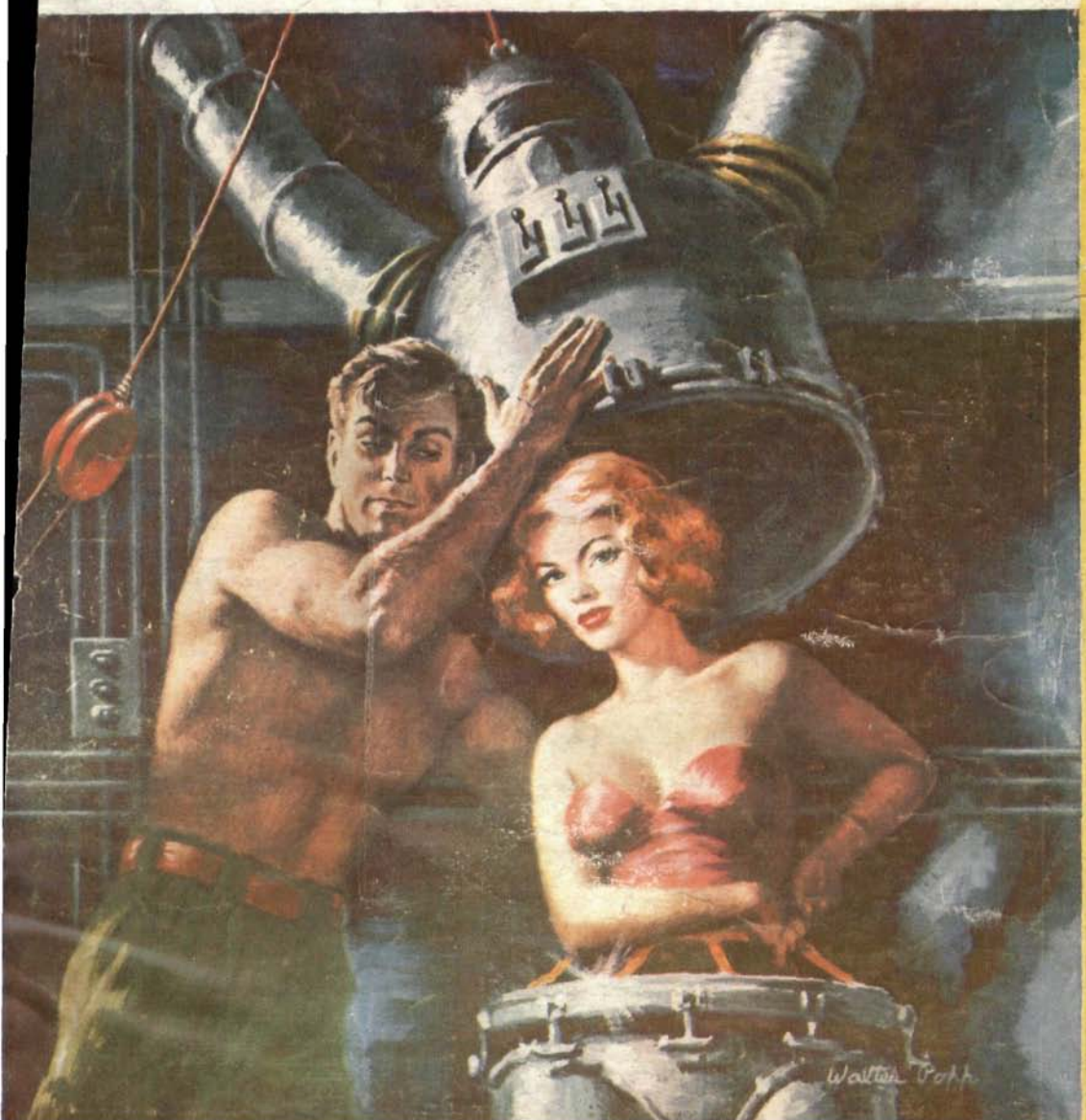

featuring **THE CONDITIONED CAPTAIN** *a novel by Fletcher Pratt*

and **WE BREATHE FOR LOVE** *a novelet by Noel Loomis*

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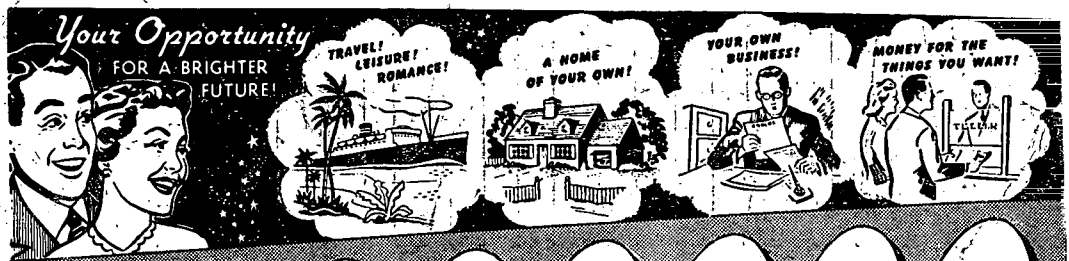

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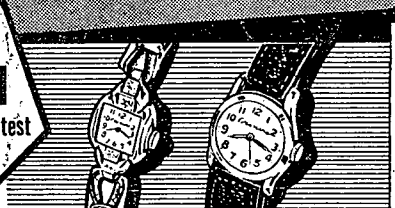

TODAY! . . . here on this very page! . . . is an amazing contest opportunity that combines fascinating puzzle-solving enjoyment with fabulous cash prizes . . . *PLUS a guaranteed reward for EVERYBODY who completes the contest.*

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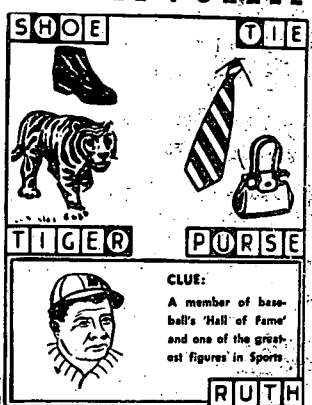
See Sample Puzzle at Upper Right!

This contest consists of puzzles like the SAMPLE PUZZLE above. Note how we filled it in . . . how we identified the objects and found that certain letters in the names of the objects stood out from the rest, thus to spell out the name of the famous person pictured at the bottom. Read the explanation carefully.

Note how we identified each object with a word of as many letters as there are boxes in diagram accompanying it. In upper left we filled in word SHOE; in upper right, TIE. In lower left, TIGER; in lower right, PURSE. Note that some of the letters fell into boxes with a little circular frame inside. Those "circled" letters, arranged into proper order, spell out the famous name we are looking for.

Here, for example, the "circled" letters are H T R U. So we run through the names printed under the puzzle and discover Babe RUTH, whose last name is the correct solution, and whose picture you see at bottom.

SAMPLE PUZZLE



Solution is One of the Names Below:

Zane GREY — Henry CLAY
Aaron BURR — Babe RUTH

500 Cash Prizes!

1st Prize . .	$50,000.00
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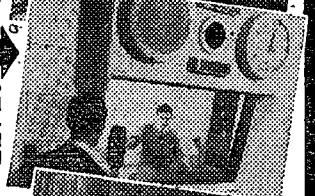

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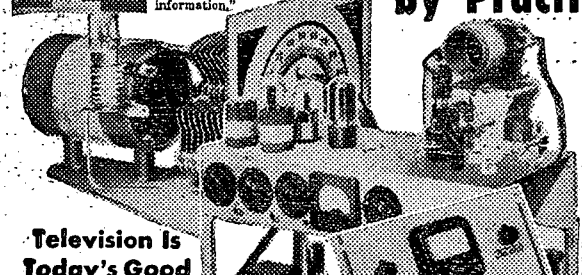

This Is Just Some of the Equipment My Students Build. All Parts Yours to Keep.

Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION Technicians. Most had no previous experience; many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. You also get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. Pictured at left, are just a few of the pieces of equipment you build with kits of parts I send. You experiment with, learn circuits common to Radio and Television.

Television Is Today's Good Job Maker

TV now reaches from coast-to-coast. Qualify for a good job as a service technician or operator. My course includes many lessons on TV. You get practical experience . . . work on circuits common to both Radio and Television with my kits. Now is the time to get ready for success in Television!

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Act Now! Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Coupon entitles you to actual Servicing Lesson; shows how you learn at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, Pres., Dept. 3EQ, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 39th Year.

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Vol. 30, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION May, 1953

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He knew he was being framed, and he was willing to face the music—but he never expected such beautiful music!

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They claim this coupon brings you "good luck"

"Six months after mailing the coupon, I had a promotion and a big raise in pay!"

"From the moment I marked the coupon, my luck changed!"

"My break came when I sent the coupon!"

These statements are typical! I.C.S. gets letters like these regularly. Coupon senders report pay raises. Others win important promotions or new, interesting assignments. Still others find happiness, job security, opportunities never dreamed possible.

Is it LUCK? The results are so impressive, so quick in coming, that some say the I.C.S. coupon is "lucky." Of course, that's not true. The real reason for these amazing results is what happens to the person when he or she mails the coupon.

Coupon is first step! Naturally, you want to make good. But you've put off doing something about it. Mailing this coupon is *definite action!* It shows you're fed up with waiting for the breaks. You're determined to make your own breaks! And this determination alone accounts for much of the "luck" you'll start to experience.

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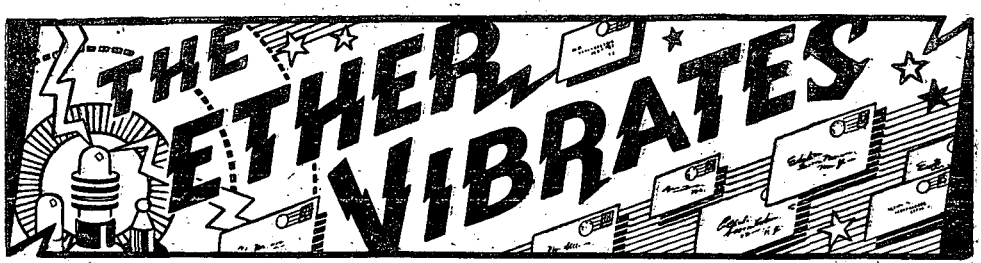

A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

HOW would you like to take a year's trip somewhere and come back to find the world four or five billion years older?

In his best-selling book "The Exploration of Space," Arthur Clarke deals optimistically with the approaching enigma of space travel. Admitting that man is faced with distances so enormous that covering them even in a lifetime seems impossible, he brings up an interesting mathematical ally—the theoretical foreshortening of time due to speed.

Einstein takes the blame again as Clarke points out that at very high speeds some queer things happen to time within a space ship. You know, of course, that according to the theory of relativity, the mass of a body increases with its speed until at the speed of light it reaches infinity. This, therefore, marks the upper limit of obtainable velocities.

Now, as mass increases with speed, no time slows down. As the speed approaches that of light and the mass grows toward infinity, time stretches out and out. At the speed of light mass is infinite and time stands still.

What could you accomplish if time stood still for you? You would have all the time in the world (to borrow a story title from Mr. Clarke) to do anything you wanted to do. The longest voyage would have no terrors; the most gargantuan project would need no hurrying? On paper.

If these speculations be true, they would appear to deal a fatal blow to our own favorite theory that time travel is an intriguing bit of mental gymnastics which we thoroughly enjoy and encourage in our stories, but which we do not for a moment believe possible. In fact, we have gone further and publicly stated our belief that there is no such thing as time at all; that the word and the concept are a purely arbitrary invention of man. There is actually only the present, the tiny infinitesimal point of a moment which is constantly passing. Having passed, you are immediately confronted by another, but the one which is gone is gone, is not imperishably preserved in a mythical aspic known as the past. The concept of time travel entails the belief that the past is still in existence and that if the machinery to achieve it can only be worked out, man may go back and visit himself there.

Now Mr. Clarke maintains that only is there such a tangibility as time, but that its normally even progress can be slowed to a standstill through so simple a method as speed. This would indicate that there is no such thing as a standard rate of time to begin with, since different individuals at different points in the universe may be traveling at different rates of speed. Hence their "normal" rates of time may differ rather widely from each other.

Following Einstein's mathematics, one finds that the speed of light may be closely approached, but never actually achieved. Thus time may be slowed almost to—but never quite to a stop. It should be inserted parenthetically here that Mr. Clarke believes the Einstein theory, like any other theory, may one day be amended, in which case we may not only exceed the speed of

(Continued on page 131)

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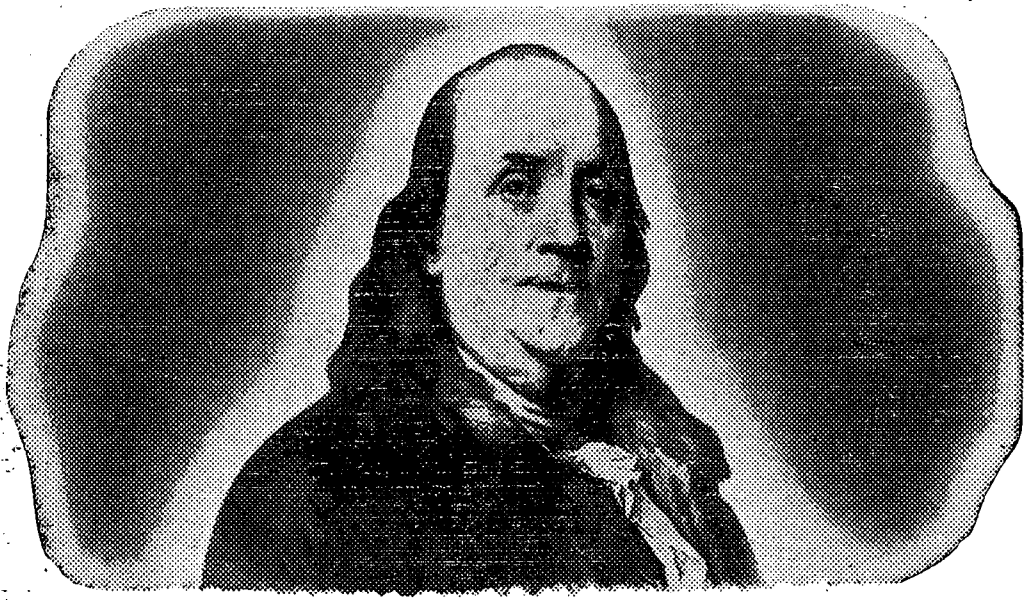
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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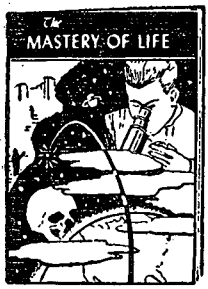

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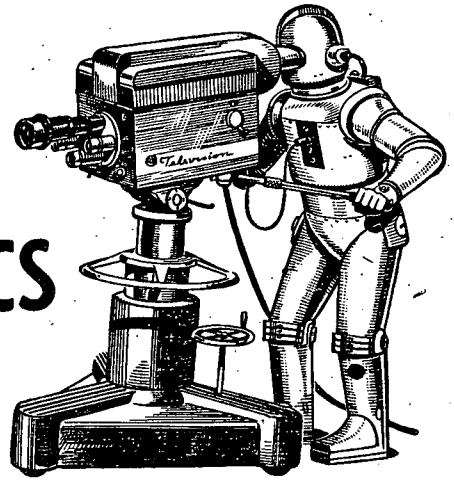
Wizard's Workshop

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



HIGH ABOVE Manhattan, lost in a maze of corridors and offices is a laboratory-workshop that would have been the envy of a medieval alchemist. Here James Glenn, the Radio City Merlin, is called upon to devise the gimmicks demanded by tv scripts ranging from science fiction to comedy.

As Manager of NBC's Staging Services and Special Effects, the former Signal Corps photographer is custodian of a bag of visual tricks that would have made the old wizard blink.

His workshop is a wonderland of prisms, coils, gears, springs, wires, levers, tubes, beakers, balloons, containers and pots all jammed onto closet shelves. "You never know when these things will come in handy," he says, tucking a piece of cord into a box. Then, pointing to one refugee from a Rube Goldberg cartoon, he showed us a prop from a science fiction show. He demonstrated, and without benefit of a magic wand, this happened: A teaspoon of power, dropped into a cup, poured a container of milk down a funnel. This set a paddle in motion which released a string and struck a match. When the string burned through, two eggs disappeared into the machine, plunged a lever, and a finished cake popped out. We didn't believe it for a minute. "Well," Mr. Glenn admitted, "we knew you were coming so we—but you've got to admit, the thing demonstrates timing, the most important element in tv gimmicks."

More difficult was the problem of providing a cake with a birthday candle that refused to be blown out. After failing to extinguish the stubborn candle, the guest of honor was to hammer it down into the cake. With the assistance of Austin Huhn, an amiable sorcerer's apprentice, an imitation candle was devised with a flame provided by a tiny light blub, the size of a matchhead, with approximately one candlepower. It was necessary to match the actinic value (the red-blue color composition of the flame) to the other, legitimate candles. Also they had to install a non-repetitive flicker so that the "candle" wouldn't resemble a miniature beacon. The cake had to be wired and a metal tube inserted under the candle so it could be driven down straight. All this took three days to prepare—and thirty seconds on your tv screen.

Not all flame can be imitated with light bulbs and china silk, especially on color tv. The basic fuel for tv flames (exclusive of leading ladies) is Sterno. This produces a blue flame which does not register too well on an orthicon lens. To give it more body and visibility, Mr. Glenn dipped into a tin obviously labeled "dynamite" and added a housewifely pinch of that "rare chemical," sodium chloride. For color tv the recipe is as follows: a pinch of lithium chloride for purple flame: a dash of strontium chloride for a bright red flame, and if you want an eerie green flame, the secret is boric acid. If you intend to experiment with these, we suggest also a supply of asbestos pads.

On our way past the flickering green burner, we noticed a bright chrome gadget replete with coils, grates and wires. "Oh, that?" our query was met with. "We make our afternoon tea on that. But if we want it steaming hot for television, we tint it blue and add a pinch of titanium tetrachloride."

We were sorry we couldn't stay for tea. Our editor was already boiling.

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the Conditioned

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Captain

A Novel by FLETCHER PRATT

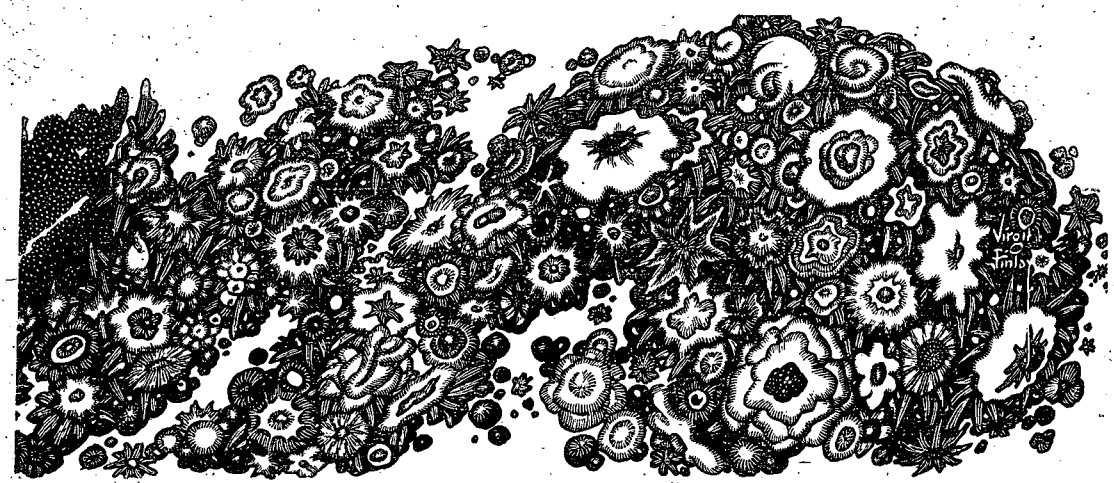
II

"HOW do you plead?" asked the President of the Court. He was a big man with grizzled gray hair, big enough to make the other two behind the table look small, although the shoulders gleaming with insignia on their uniform coats were broad enough.

"Not guilty, said Captain Thorwald Paulsson, and ran the tip of his tongue over dry lips.

"You may sit down."

The Captain knew he was being framed . . . but he didn't see how he fitted into the picture



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He Was Willing to Face the Music — Though

Captain Paulsson took his place at the table for the accused beside his counsel. He was probably the youngest man in the room, certainly the youngest to be wearing the twinned rockets of a captain in the Space Fleet. The scrape of the recorder's chair was audible as he stood up.

"I will call Lieutenant Bernard Boykin, psychological officer of the *Vermont,*" he said. A sergeant at the door stepped out, and a moment later returned with a narrow-faced officer, who nodded his head at Paulsson with an expression that was almost one of sympathy.

"You were psychological officer on the *Vermont* during her last voyage?" asked the recorder.

"I was."

"Tell us what happened with regard to Captain Paulsson."

Paulsson's counsel, a legal officer named Martens, raised his hand. "I have an objection unless Lieutenant Boykin dates the events."

The President of the Court said: "Lieutenant Boykin will date the events."

The psychological officer reached in one pocket for a roll of micro-film, in another for a reader, and snapped the device on the front of his face. "This is my record of the events, made at the time," he said. "On October 19, Earth Date, after we had come out of superspeed, and were in formation with the *San Martin* and *Radetzky*—"

Martens raised his hand again. "Lieutenant Boykin, how good was your formation?"

"I don't know, sir. There was some talk that it was not perfect, but I am not a navigator."

"Proceed."

Boykin turned his oddly masked face toward the court. "On October 19, Captain Paulsson went to his cabin after going off duty, and remained nearly three hours. As the period included the usual one for lunch, I recorded the matter. On October 20, while the formation was maneuvering toward the point where contact with the space pirates was expected, Captain Paulsson failed to participate in group games, and had his dinner sent to his cabin. On October 21, while we were still maneuvering, Captain Paulsson remained on duty two hours beyond his watch, and when a calculation was brought to him from Navigation, he told the messenger to get that damned rot out of here. He again failed to participate in group games and ate alone. On October 22, the navigator informed me that Captain Paulsson's conduct was becoming undemocratic and irrational. I was forced to agree, and spoke to the Captain. He told me that a dangerous situation existed aboard the ship, that Commander Parks was attempting to sabotage the ship's part in the expedition. I ordered a McGilvray reliability test on Captain Paulsson—"

Martens' hand came up again. "I should like to ask for the result of that test."

The recorder said, "Objection! There will be ample opportunity to cross-examine."

The President of the Court said, "We think the result of the test should be inserted at this point, as making the narrative more orderly. This is not a civil court, and we will not be bound by ordinary rules of procedure."

"The result of the test was negative," said Boykin. "I could detect nothing menacing either in Captain Paulsson's basic psychology or in his conditioning. I thereupon ran the same test on Commander Parks. The result in his case also was negative. I was therefore forced to report to the squadron psychological officer that in my opinion a dangerous temperamental and psychological situation existed aboard the *Vermont*, and as a result she was ordered to withdraw and return to base."

HE REACHED up to unlock the reader and the recorder arose. "Lieutenant Boykin," he said, "what,

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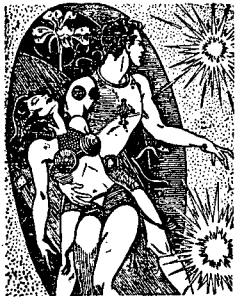
in your opinion, would have been the result of such a situation if it had been allowed to develop? There have been similar cases before, haven't there?"

The lieutenant crinkled his brows. "I don't know of any cases since the early days of colonization, before they really started thorough conditioning for Space Fleet men. And I don't know the answer to the other question, either. It's our business as psychs to keep the situation from developing, as you put it."

"Then the whole setup is practically



without precedent as far as you know?"

"That's correct."

"And rather than take a chance, you thought it safer to ask for the withdrawal of the ship. That's all."

Martens rose. "Lieutenant, how long have you been a psychological officer?"

"Seven years, sir. Since graduation from the psych training branch at the Academy."

"In that time have you ever heard of a case, one case, in which the McGilvray test failed?"

For the first time Boykin seemed a trifle hesitant. "I wouldn't say it exactly that way . . . that is, you can't answer the question with a flat yes or no. You see—"

"Well, put it in your own terms, then."

"Well, we don't claim psychology to be an absolutely exact science, like chemistry or mathematics. And we don't claim the McGilvray brings out absolutely every traumatic detail that might make the subject turn unreliable in an emergency. It's simply that in the vast majority of cases, it detects dangerous or unfit persons under service conditions."

Martens said, "Then there's room for the exceptional case, the case practically without precedent, in which the McGilvray might miss some defective factor?"

"It's not impossible."

"That's all I wished to lay before the court."

He sat down. The recorder thanked Boykin and said, "I will call Captain Roger Van Ellenbogen Parks."

He came in, a lemon-blond, almost without eyebrows, who took his place in the witness chair and looked past Paulsson without seeing him.

The recorder said, "We would like your story of the events that took place aboard the *Vermont* from October 19, Earth Date, on."

Parks answered in a crisp, clear voice. "Yes, sir," he stated confidently, "I first noticed that something was wrong on the 20th, I think it was, when Captain Paulsson failed to participate in group games. On the next day a messenger brought my calculation for the day's run back to me with the word that it was obscene rot, and when it was my hour to go on command watch—"

"Just a minute. Is it usual for the Navigator to take a command watch?"

"No, sir. We were one major officer short. Commander Kern was detained for some reason unknown to me, half an hour before take-off, and no other major officer had been conditioned, so I had to carry on as both Executive and Navigator."

"With the result that you received your promotion to Captain. Go on."

PARKS said, "When it was my hour to go on command watch Captain Paulsson was on the bridge and refused to be relieved. Some of the men were already complaining about his dictatorial and undemocratic manners, so I reported

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the matter to Lieutenant Boykin. That's all."

"You never had any previous difficulty with Captain Paulsson?"

"No sir. I had little contact with him before joining the *Vermont*, and this was the first time we had been together on anything but a training cruise."

"That's all."

Parks' hands gripped the arms of his chair a little as Martens rose. The defense counsel surveyed him for a moment before speaking. Then, "Are you acquainted with a young lady named Desariza?"

"Objection," said the recorder.

The President of the Court said, "What is your reason for this line of questioning?"

"I'm trying to show personal animus," said Martens.

"I think I will sustain the objection," said the President. "We are dealing with events which took place while the parties were under psychological conditioning for deep space travel, and connections with non-space groups would not be carried through the conditioning. The young lady's name shows she is not in the Space Service."

"Very well," said Martens, amiably. "Captain, how old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"You're one of the youngest captains in the service, are you not? Along with Paulsson?"

"I guess so. Yes."

"If there were a vacancy for commodore, that would make it probable that the choice might lie between you two, mightn't it?"

"Same objection," said the recorder.

"Sustained," said the President. "The Court will not be unduly influenced."

"Very well," said Martens. "Let's take a look at the events of the 19th, which you didn't mention. Who calculated the course of the *Vermont* under spin?"

"I did."

"Was the ship on station when she came out?"

"There was a slight variation. The log will show it."

"Would you call it a dangerous variation?"

Parks appeared to consider. "I don't think so. No."

"You were maneuvering at high speed under rockets on the 20th, were you not?"

"As I recall it, yes."

"Who made the calculations for that, Captain Parks?"

"I did."

"And were they accurate?"

"Within allowable limits."

Abruptly Martens changed his tone. "Captain Parks, didn't you find it a good deal of a strain to handle the Navigator's duties as well as those of the Executive?"

"Yes, I did."

"Wouldn't it have been still more of a strain if one of the officers under you had been trying to make miscalculations—deliberately—so that you had to check every step he took?"

"I suppose so, but that wasn't the case."

"Very well. If it had been the case—I say *if*—do you think you would have had time to participate in group games?"

AT THIS Parks drew himself up straighter than before. "I have always considered the morale of the crew the first consideration of an officer of the Service."

"Very noble of you, Captain. That's all for the present."

Parks left his place with the same unseeing glance past Paulsson, and the recorder said, "Subject to the stipulation that the basic facts are not contested, that's our case."

The President of the Court nodded to Martens. "Will you proceed with the defense?"

Martens said, "I expect to contest some of the basic facts before I am through here, but in order to lay the foundation, I wish to place Captain Paulsson on the stand, Captain?"

Paulsson moved to the witness chair. His tanned face showed no particular emotion.

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"Now, Captain," said Martens, "just give us your story of what happened, and remember that the Court has excluded anything that might show animus on the part of any member of the crew as psychologically impossible."

"All right," said Paulsson. "I suppose I can only start with the 19th then, when we came out of superspeed. In making the course I had used Commander Parks' calculations. When we came out, it was at a point and on a course that in my opinion were dangerously close to the *Radetzky*. I—"

"Just a minute," said Martens. "I suppose I need not remind the Court that

Hero: Future Tense

SOME of the most effective stories in literature have been written about the theme of man's injustice to man. It might be argued from this that mankind has a burning sense of justice, or, as some cynic once remarked about the laws against murder, most people simply object to being murdered.

In any case, the story in which the hero defies law and convention and takes matters into his own hands stirs the rebel in all of us, gives a dash of adrenalin to the blood and a glint to the eye. And apparently we will always have such heroes with us, for here in THE CONDITIONED CAPTAIN is one, future tense.

The Editor

if the two ships had emerged at the same point, both would have dissolved in a nuclear explosion. I enter a copy of the *Radetzky's* log to show the actual position and leave the Court to judge. Go ahead, Captain."

"I could not conceive how so dangerous an error could have been made in the calculations, but I had reason to believe that Commander Parks was—er, not altogether friendly, so I went to my cabin and re-calculated from the basic co-ordinates. The result showed that he was in error, but only slightly in error, and the errors could not be attributed to any factor I could trace. After a good deal of consideration, which was rather difficult, due to my own conditioning, I reached the conclusion that Commander Parks had introduced the error deliberately after making his calculation; and also, that the error was meant to seem dangerous without actually being so."

"What motive could he have for that?"

"I think it was because—you told me I couldn't speak about that."

"So I did," said Martens. "Go on to the 20th."

"This was so serious," said Paulsson, "that on the 20th, when it came time to maneuver on rockets, I made my own calculation. As I couldn't gather data from juniors it took a good deal of time. When I went to the bridge, I found Commander Parks' orbit calculation again contained an error, and of the same type as before, one which would apparently, but not actually, place the ship in a dangerous position, and for which there was no good way of accounting. Accordingly I used my own calculation instead of his, and continued doing so until we were detached."

"May I remind the Court," said Martens, "that if the admiral commanding had found the ship in a dangerous position more than once, Captain Paulsson would have been subject to reprimand? With an adverse effect on promotion? Captain, did you mention this to anyone?"

"Only Lieutenant Boykin. Regulations did not allow me to speak of it to anyone else. He said he had already received a complaint of irrational and undemocratic conduct on my part and gave me a McGilvray test."

"What about the calculations Commander Parks made? Weren't they recorded?"

"No sir. Regulations do not permit the recording of controversial issues after conditioning, except by the psychological officer."

Martens said, "I think we all know it. I merely wished to be sure that the Court remembered this fact. Now, I do not think I will present any further evidence. It seems to me perfectly clear that what

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I have presented establishes beyond question that Commander Parks, as he was then, found a means of evading either the psychological conditioning which guarantees that officers of the fleet co-operate with each other while in space, or the McGilvray test, or both. It seems to me that for reasons which I will not attempt to discuss, he used this freedom to attempt to destroy Captain Paulsson's reputation. I ask a reexamination of the McGilvray test by a competent board and the release of the defendant with honors."

The President looked at the recorder. He said, "I do not intend to make a speech, but will stand on the facts, which fail to support anything so fantastic as this statement."

The three members of the Court rose. When they had left the room, Martens leaned close to Paulsson. "Looks bad," he said. "When they wouldn't let me bring the Desariza business in, I was afraid we'd have trouble. Simply married to the idea that conditioning can't be evaded."

"If I ever get high enough—" began Paulsson, but Martens stopped him with a hand.

"However, I slipped that business about the records on controversial issues in. That will give a good basis for an appeal to the Council on the basis of a regulation concealing information essential to justice, and I think I can make that one stick."

The door at the back opened and the members filed in as those before the table rose. The President said, "This Court finds there is much merit in the contention of the defense that the McGilvray test needs re-examination by a competent board, and so petitions the Space Commissioner. Pending the report of such board we find Captain Thorwald Paulsson guilty of undemocratic and dictatorial conduct, to the detriment of the morale of his crew, and we suspend him from the service until the report of the board, or until he voluntarily submits himself for psychological treatment to deal with his temperamental ailment."

II

THE WALL indicator buzzed and flashed its light, and the identification numbers on the plastic slip that dropped out placed the Mr. Meyeronen who wished to see him as an industrialist rather than another reporter. Thorwald Paulsson said, "Accept the interview" to the machine, and turned to look across the waving trees of what had once been part of the Victorian desert toward the Business Tower. He supposed he would have to find some kind of job now, even if the Council agreed to hear his appeal, because the report of that board would take a while. He ought to consider himself lucky, he thought, because most businessmen were anxious to get trained Space Fleet people into their organizations. Would they let him use his two names or make him take a single one and a series of numbers, like other earth-bound "groundhogs"?

The panel slid back with a click, and a stocky man with bushy eyebrows came into the room, shoved a hand at Paulsson, said, "Meyeronen", and sat down without being invited. The Captain stayed on his feet, lifted blond eyebrows slightly to emphasize the point, and said, "What can I do for you?"

"The most important thing you can do is close the blackout on that wall." His finger shot out in a vigorous gesture.

"Indeed? May I ask why?"

"Because—" Out of the corner of his eye, Paulsson caught the flash from the window of Business Tower, ducked, dodged, whipped out his own sidearm and fired, all in one motion. The deadly missile exploded in the midst of the decor with a puff of flame, and there was a slight hiss as pressure air drained out through the hole it had left in the plastic. Paulsson flung himself across the floor to touch the button that actuated the window-wall blackout, and turned to face Meyeronen, who was just picking himself up. The man was smiling.

"My advice was good," he said. "How was your aim?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to find

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out," said Paulsson, striding across the room toward the phone.

"If you're going to call Civil Police, you needn't bother," said Meyeronen. "There won't be any trace of anyone who fired into this room. These people are too sharp to operate in that much daylight."

Paulsson looked at him sharply a moment, then came back and sat down. "I suppose you better tell me about it," he said.

"Not till you run an induction check on this room to make sure everything we say isn't being picked up on instrument. Have you got a check-box?"

"In my kit. We have to have them in the service." Paulsson got up, slid back the panel to the sleeping room, produced the check-box and began to run it over the walls. Meyeronen regarded the process with a vague smile around the corners of his mouth. He sat perfectly still except for the slight movement of his head. When Paulsson had finished and settled himself again, he said, "What do you propose to do?"

"Now? Or do you mean in general. Get a job, I guess."

"I mean about your suspension."

"I'm going to appeal to the Council, though I suppose it can't act till that board on the McGilvray test makes its report."

Meyeronen said, "Don't. The report of the board will be negative, you'll lose your appeal, and the suspension will be converted into a dismissal."

"Look here," said Paulsson with mounting irritation, "you seem to know a hell of a lot, and I'm not sure I like it. Or you either."

MEYERONEN smiled again. "A good many people don't. They leave calling cards with me in the form of explosive bullets." He glanced at the damaged wall. "But as you say, I do know some things. For one, the McGilvray test is perfectly reliable within its limits, and so is the conditioning process. In Parks' case, it was the psychologist who conditioned him that was wrong. He failed to wipe Parks' dislike of you from his mind before the trip, and Parks acted in a perfectly natural manner."

"I'll be damned! Can you prove it?"

"No. The psychologist is dead. This gang isn't taking any chances that their operations will come to light."

"I see." Paulsson looked reflective. "I think you had better tell me who this gang are, and what they're trying to put over."

"Fundamentally, the group who call themselves the Reformers. The Efficiency Party on Earth. The representatives of Polska and Gheorgilul and Kaganovitch and half a dozen other planets that were colonized from the old Eastern European countries. What they're aiming at is to transform the Council of Worlds into an old-fashioned totalitarian dictatorship, with themselves at the center of it."

"It seems fantastic," said Paulsson. "I will admit that in the Service we don't keep much track of politics—"

"You'd better begin to. You're in the center of the picture. They had to get you out of the way before they could put through the plan. You see, under the rule of promoting one of the youngest officers available when a flag rank vacancy occurs, either you or Parks would get the next one, and it wouldn't be too long before you were head of the Service. Now there's no question but it will be Parks. Parks is their man, and they're willing to wait for him to get there."

"But what could he do, even if he were head of the Service? The Fleet's perfectly loyal to the Council and the peace of the worlds. His orders wouldn't be obeyed if he turned on them."

Meyeronen smiled again. "You are naive. I don't sit in on all the private meetings of the Reformers, but I can imagine how it will go from what I do know. Suppose that Polska, for example, reports a major emergency—an invasion of alien life-forms or something of the kind. The whole fleet, or most of it, is mobilized to send there, with every man in it conditioned to co-operate with Parks and to accept his orders. As soon as he gets into space, the emergency will be that the planets refusing to accept Re-

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former governments must be brought into line by force."

"They'd resist, by God!"

"Against the whole Space Fleet of the Council of Worlds? Would you care to try it?"

"No, I suppose not." Paulsson cupped his chin in one hand and surveyed his companion silently for a moment, while Meyeronen returned the glance, as calmly as before. Finally the Captain said, "I find it hard to believe that such a conspiracy exists, even if I don't understand all the circumstances surrounding this—court-martial. But granting that it does, and that Parks is a part of it, how will it be any help if I fail to appeal?"

Meyeronen said, "The court-martial was conducted in good faith by men who were loyally following the regulations. These people simply arranged a set of circumstances where nothing else could happen. They're clever. Clever enough so they may even have you working for them, although I don't think so, or I wouldn't have come here. But on your question, a group of us who don't want all this to happen have other plans for you."

"I'm at least interested. What are they?"

"Did you ever hear of Danaan?"

Paulsson frowned. "It's a planet of one of the Bootes stars, isn't it? I'm not sure. I remember the characteristics."

HIS voice matter-of-fact, Meyeronen said, "It is a planet of one of the Bootes stars, and an Irish colony. Applied for membership in the Council about eleven years ago. The committee of inspection found the Danaans hadn't been able to hold a world government together and were split up in separate nations, but as the climatic conditions are pretty stiff, recommended admission on a one non-voting delegate status. Then, about three years ago, the Danaans suddenly withdrew their delegate from the Council and made their planet semi-closed, admitting official diplomatic representatives only. One of our people was on the standing committee of inspection and came out with it."

"And he thinks the Danaans are up to something?"

"More than up to something. Danaan is a very young planet of a very young sun. Our man found out enough to be certain that a considerable amount of neptunium-237 still exists there—it has a half-life in the millions of years—and that the Danaans were mining it."

"Even if they did, it wouldn't do them much good. You can't use the stuff for anything but the manufacture of plutonium."

"Wrong," said Meyeronen. "At least if our man is right. He thinks they've succeeded in inventing the neptunium motor, or were very close to it, and the reason they closed their planet to outsiders was to keep any inspection committees from nosing around and finding out what's really going on. If that's what the Danaans are after, it would give them a head start on any other planet, and they could do about as they pleased."

Paulsson nodded. "And you think they'd misuse it, so you want me to go there and find out what's really going on, is that it?"

"Correct. Only it's more than that. We want the neptunium motor, too. Not an easy job. But you see how it all ties in. If *we* have the neptunium motor, we can talk turkey to the Reformers. It would have to become public property, of course; we couldn't hold it out. But if you went out there and came back with it, there'd be no question about your reinstatement and even your promotion, right over Parks' head. Your position would be pretty unassailable, and he never would get to be head of the service."

Paulsson sighed. "It's a beautiful dream," he said. "And I'd like to go into it; but there's just one little stumbling block in the way. Money. It would have to be a semi-armed ship from what you tell me. It would have to be anyway, because I seem to remember warnings on potential piracy in that area. Who pays for that?"

Once more Meyeronen smiled. "It may

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Beneath the Argo the menacing ball of fire shot upward

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not be quite so difficult to find the money to build a ship as you suppose. I'd like you to have dinner with a couple of friends of mine."

"And permission from the Council to take a ship like that out? And the crew?"

"The Council may be difficult, I'll admit. There are enough Reformers on it to make it hard to pass the bill if they think you're going to gain anything by it. But the neptunium and neptunium motor ideas have been kept pretty closely within our group, and we expect to put it forward as an ordinary prospecting voyage. On the crew, you're too modest. Since that battle off the Horsehead nebula there isn't a spaceman anywhere who wouldn't be on the jump to sail with Captain Paulsson, even if he were only going to Saturn for methane ice." He glanced shrewdly at his man. "Well?"

PAULSSON stood up. "All right. But—" he stopped suddenly in the process of pulling together his plasti-jacket. "Look here, aren't these Reformers pretty well aware of what's going on? Or they wouldn't have taken that shot at me through the window."

"Aren't afraid of a little danger, are you, Captain? The point is that they have probably been watching you from over there ever since you took this room in Temporary Quarters Tower. Doubtless with some idea of making you an offer themselves, something that would tie you to them without your being aware of it. When they spotted me coming in here, they knew that jig would be up if I got a chance to talk to you. The bullet was meant for me."

The panel slid back and he followed Paulsson into the elevator. As they reached the lobby of the Temporary Quarters tower, two men in the uniform of the Civil Police stepped from behind one of the indoor trees growing through the floor and halted them with an upheld hand on which Paulsson noted that the third finger was oddly bent. "Captain Thorwald Paulsson?" he asked.

"That's me."

"I'll have to ask you to come to the prefecture. A man in Business Tower was shot a few moments ago after firing a shot into your window. He was a well-known criminal and I don't doubt that you acted in self-defense and perfectly within your rights, but the thing has to be cleared legally."

"Oh, hell," said Paulsson. "All right, lead on."

"Just a minute," said Meyeronen. "Captain Paulsson and I are on our way to keep a dinner engagement, and this would be most inconvenient. Do you mind if I call Commissioner Wetwerbass and see if this can't be postponed?"

The one with the finger looked puzzled. The other one muttered, "We got our orders."

Meyeronen said, "No doubt. You probably have a warrant, too, unless somebody's been more careless than I think. All the same, Captain Paulsson isn't going with you."

"You mean he's going to resist arrest?" said the first speaker, his hand sliding toward his belt, but stopping abruptly as Paulsson, taking his cue, whipped out his own sidearm and covered the pair.

"You're damned right he's going to resist arrest by you two," said Meyeronen pleasantly. "You're no more policemen than I'm the governor of Antarctica. Now, get out!"

AS THE pair retreated, crestfallen, he produced a small metal tube from one pocket and blew into it. "Silent alarm," he remarked as he replaced it. "I seldom go out without having a few of our own people to cover me, and that pair will be well taken care of before they get out of the building. They were going to kidnap you."

He led the way toward one of the side doors. "Nice work," said Paulsson, "but how did you know they were phony?"

"Civil Police has had plenty of time to call your room on visi-phone and straighten things out. Also, they waited for you in the lobby where there isn't any phone so one of us could call the Commissioner, instead of coming up to

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your apartment, where there is. But the real flaw was that bent finger. A real Civil Policeman wouldn't be allowed to go around with a defect like that for three hours. He'd have to take it to a plastic surgeon. Here's our car—get in!"

"I guess I'm going to need a guardian," said Paulsson.

"I guess you're going to need more than one before this is over with. Don't worry—they'll be provided."

III

THE heli-car balanced delicately on its shock-absorber legs and settled to earth with a brief grunt. Paulsson, who had been too much occupied with his conversation with Meyeronen to pay attention to where they were going, made a sound of astonishment.

"It's the Arizin place!" he said.

Meyeronen's smile was as pleasant as ever. "I thought you'd be surprised. Surprise you more to know that the original recommendation to get you in came from here, wouldn't it?" He stepped out, handed the keys to the respectful parking attendant, and led the way between rows of bush eucalyptus up to the door where Paulsson himself had so often come. They had evidently been seen approaching. It slid back soundlessly on the outer hall and a robot voice intoned musically, "You will be received in the solar. You will be received in the solar."

Desariza was lying on a kind of long chair in a sun suit, her dark hair spread like a fan across the back. She waved a hand to Paulsson. "If I weren't so lazy, I'd have been dressed for dinner before you got here," she said, "but as long as you're here, I'm going to have one drink with you before I do. Father, do you want to work the manual? A Blue Cloud for me, please. The sun will be under in a minute, and it will be too cool for activated drinks."

Benarizin put aside his reader and began dialing on the drink-box beside his chair. There were a few desultory remarks; when the visitors were supplied with liquids and had settled themselves, Meyeronnen said, "He's going to do it."

Desariza flashed Paulsson a smile of complete approval. "I said he would as soon as he found out what was really behind that court-martial, didn't I?"

"I still find it a little hard to believe," said Paulsson, "in spite of that shot through the window." He turned to the others. "They tried to get Meyeronen before he could talk to me."

Benarizin and his daughter both started to talk at once, and then he stopped. She said, "You don't think I was going around with Roger Parks because I liked him, do you?"

Paulsson grinned. "Yes, I did, to be frank. And how do I know that you aren't playing me in the same way? Or both of us against the middle?"

Benarizin cleared his throat. "You two can settle your private affairs later," he said. "This worries me a little. They haven't come quite so close to the surface before, and I'm afraid it means they're nearly ready to come into the open; that is, that we don't have as much time as we thought. Anything new from Columbine on it?"

Meyeronen said, "His last message was delivered this morning. It only confirms that the two delegates from Santa Eulalia will vote with the Reformers in exchange for getting back the delegate they lost when they had that revolution a while ago."

"Mmm," said Benarizin, and turned to Paulsson, "I suppose Meyeronen has told you enough about the proposed trip to Danaan already so that it won't be necessary for me to rehearse them. What I want to know is what you need to make the expedition a success."

"A ship," said Paulsson. "About a class IV, with a vertically operated spin-room, methane working fluid for the rockets—you can find methane planets in practically every system that has any, and—"

"Sorry to interrupt," said Desariza, standing up, "but things are getting technical, and now I really am going to dress." She waved and was gone, long hair trailing down her shoulders.

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PAULSSON went on, "We'll need a high-speed spin chamber for the super-speed run, because I don't want to have to stop anywhere to let out water and take in air. And that brings up another requirement; if I'm to make a no-stop run at superspeed, I'll need a mathematical navigator of absolutely the first order. I can do navigation for distances a couple of light-years apart myself, but I've always done it with the fleet and a staff of computers, and every ship in the squadron checks every other one, which gives a safety factor. But on a single-handed trip to that distance, it will take something special in navigation. I wouldn't want to come out of spin in the middle of an A type star, for instance."

Benarizin said, "Let's hear all about the ship before we get to other details."

Meyeronen grunted, "Personnel's my problem. Easier than you think."

"All right," said Paulsson. I think we need medium armament. I can't see the Space Commissioner allowing us to use atomics, or the Council passing a bill to permit them on a private vessel if there are as many Reformers in it as you say. But we won't be doing any fighting on a planetary basis anyway, and medium armament with solid shot are better in space."

"That's odd," said Meyeronen. "I would have thought that torpedoes would be the thing."

"They are, in a military sense," said Paulsson. "But that's for a fleet which can launch a whole flight of torpedoes and keep them under control. A Class IV job, such as I'm talking about, wouldn't be able to launch more than two or three —there aren't enough computing integrators—and any ship with reasonably good defense could send out interceptors against that many, or even take them away from us by concentrating all its impulses on the band of one torpedo. A solid shot doesn't have anything to be influenced by impulses and if it's moving fast enough, simply scrunches right through an interceptor. Once you make a shot-hole in an opponent, then you can feed him a torpedo."

Benarizin said slowly, "Your points are well taken. I think I know where there is a ship that can be satisfactorily converted. Now what about conditioning?"

Paulsson shook his head. "I don't think so. I've been conditioned and deconditioned enough times so that I know a good deal about it. In the first place, I doubt whether it will be necessary for a voyage of the length we're thinking of. In the second place, we have to bear the paramount interest of people back here on Earth in mind, and when you're under conditioning the only paramount interest you have is the mission."

"Isn't that true here?"

"No. If what Meyeronen told me is right, it's really a double mission. The main object is to get me back in the service with rank high enough to keep Parks in hand. It may turn out that the accomplishment of that purpose requires a different handling of the neptunium business than we're thinking of now. I don't want to be psychologically conditioned so that I simply can't think of a thing but that neptunium motor. And there's another thing—can you trust your psychologists? I hear one of them did some funny things with Parks."

Meyeronen said, "Less people and steps involved the better."

A VOICE called from the inner door, "All ready now," and they looked up to see Desariza in evening garb that looked even better on her than the sun suit. The men got up and followed her into the dining room, where she touched the controls that produced a pine-scented twilight with gentle music, and they took their places. A butler began to serve.

"Did you get everything decided?" asked the girl.

"Not quite," said Paulsson. "There are one or two worries yet. For example, how can I be sure you won't elope with some groundhog before I get back?"

"How can I be sure you won't fall for some siren out there?" she flashed. "This trip is a good deal like Jason's search

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for the golden fleece, isn't it? And you know what happened to him? He got all tangled up with a witch."

"We'll call her the *Argo,* anyway," said Paulsson. "That's a good name and a good omen. She made it, didn't she?"

Benarizin said, rather heavily, "What really worries me is the question of the Council. On precedent, the Space Commissioner will refer the application for a private ship for a prospecting voyage to them. Can we get it through against the opposition of the Reformers?"

"Delicate question of tactics," said Meyeronen. "They'll ask where we want to send our—*Argo.* If we say to Danaan, the objection will be that it's already colonized, and if we say general prospecting, the objection will be that that's a job for the Space Fleet."

Paulsson put down his fork. "What really worries me," he said, "—assuming that you get past the Council—is the question of personnel. I mentioned it before. Is it time to bring it up again?"

Meyeronen smiled one of his smiles. "Well, for a start, how would you like to have General Ossimetz Vnadiv?"

Paulsson opened his mouth. "The old Bulgarian Lightning! You don't mean you can get him! But if you can, why isn't he in command of the expedition instead of me? He knows more about tactics than I'll ever learn."

"One of ours," said Meyeronen. "We don't want him as commander for the perfectly good reason that we want you. But his name will attract recruits, and when you get to Danaan, the very fact that you have Vnadiv with you is apt to discourage hostility."

"All the same, I'll feel like a fool being in authority over General Vnadiv," said Paulsson. "Do you have any other characters like that lined up?"

"How would you like Professor Dr. Per Lowendijk as your navigator?" said Meyeronen.

Paulsson's mouth came open again. "How would I like to have the ghost of Pythagoras just running a comptometer?" he said. "You people certainly put out the power when doing things."

"*We* people," corrected Desariza. "There are—" A magenta-colored light suddenly began flashing from a corner of the room, and a robot voice cried, Warning! Overheard! Warning!"

"Oh," said Desariza, as her father leaped from his place with a jerk of the hand that upset his wineglass in a splash of red across the table. Meyeronen's pleasant face took on an ugly look; Benarizin flung himself on the switch that actuated the window blackout and as he did so there was a flash of intolerable light, level across the night outside.

"You didn't check," said Meyeronen.

Desariza said, "We usually leave that to Chamazeras, and he's very good. I can't understand—"

Paulsson felt a wild urge to do something, but there didn't seem anything to do. One of the doors slid back and a young man with sideburns and a light-gun in his hand came in, panting slightly. "I think I pinked him all right, but he got away," he said.

"Who was it? Did you see?" asked Benarizin.

"Chamazeras," said the young man. "I saw him tuning it and tripped the alarm."

Desariza gasped. "Why he's been with us ever since I can remember?"

"Must have been reached," said Meyeronen. "What was it, an induction pick-up?" And as the young man nodded, "Then he transmitted all right, and there's nothing we can do about it. I suggest we sit down and consider our dessert and how the situation will be affected by the Reformers knowing everything that's been said here tonight." He sat down himself and began spooning Venusian melon into his mouth.

Benarizin took his own place more slowly. "As I recall the conversation," he said, "they have learned that we intend to send an expedition to Danaan, which they would have to know anyway, and that it would be under Captain Paulsson, which they could deduce. I'll grant they learned the names of Vnadiv and Lowendijk." He turned to the young man with the sideburns. "Pass a

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warning to them through the usual channel, and see they are guarded."

Paulsson said, "They also found out the characteristics of the ship we propose to use. That could be bad."

"You're the captain. It's up to you to foresee any advantage they'll try to take of the ship's characteristics. What bothers me a lot more than that is that they've found out that I'm hooked up with you, Meyeronen, and so is Dess. That cuts off one of our sources of information—Parks."

Desariza looked at her plate and said, "I think I could still do a job—" and stopped as Paulsson growled.

"I doubt whether it would be effective," said Benarizin, calmly. "You want to remember that these people are fanatics, ready to jettison any emotion if it gets in the way of their objective. The main change now is that we'll have to work fast."

IV

IN the solar of the Arizin house, the three men sat digesting cigars and the memory of a well-cooked meal as they looked through the dome and the clear Australian night toward the eastward sky, where a point of light more brilliant than a planet crawled up with perceptible motion.

Paulsson said, "Station Three. That's us. How soon can they get your *Trenton* into orbit with her?"

Benarizin said, "Matter of three or four days. She's at moon base now. I'll have the mechanics sent off day after tomorrow. They're all ready and the material's assembled. The main question is what alterations you want, specifically. And from now on we refer to her as the *Argo;* my daughter will be indignant if you don't."

Meyeronen stirred and sighed. "All right, let's consider. No use postponing, even if Dess isn't here. We can't talk about anything else, anyway."

Paulsson addressed Benarizin. "The refusal to allow us to use battle-speed spin complicates things a good deal. It means we will have to make at least one stop on the way."

"I don't understand these technical details," said Benarizin. "The farthest I've ever been in space is Venus, and it's an experience I wouldn't care to repeat."

Paulsson said, "It's this way: superspeed shoots you through space with no registerable change in apparent time, and the life processes are apparently suspended. But it does take a certain amount of elapsed time aboard, and during those periods the crew continues to breathe and to produce water as a by-product, through perspiration. The result is that on a voyage as long as this the ship would run short of air and have more water than she knows what to do with. We'll have to stop over somewhere to get rid of one and take on the other."

"Where do you expect to stop?" asked Benarizin.

"I don't know yet. I'll have to consult Lowendijk," said Paulsson. "My best guess would be in the region of Aldea."

Benarizin puffed smoke and said, "This brings up the whole question of that Council vote. I'm deeply suspicious. If you run down the list, you'll see that while the downright Reformers opposed the project, they did it with a lot of sound and fury that didn't mean a thing, and didn't even put forward the best arguments they had. There were none of the usual motions and delaying tactics. And when it came to the vote, all the crypto-Reformers, like that pair from Santa Eulalia, voted on our side."

"What do you make of it?" said Meyeronen.

"They want the *Argo* to go," said Benarizin. "Beyond that I'm not prepared to say. There are two possibilities. One is that they have some sort of trap set for the ship, either at Danaan or some place where she'll have to stop over. That's why I asked Thorwald where he intended to break his trip. If he could figure it out without access to instruments, they'll be able to do the same, and the danger-point will be there."

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"Be warned," said Meyeronen to Paulsson. "Go on."

"The second possibility is that they intend to act while the Captain here is out of the way."

"I don't give that much of a percentage," said Meyeronen.

"Why not?"

"As a captain under suspension, he has practically no influence, at least publicly. Anything they intend, they could carry out quite as well with him here. No, they're playing over the long pull, and the real danger to them is that he'll succeed and be restored to the service. So the trap is more likely. They'll either try to trip him up on the way, or see to it that he doesn't get what he goes after. Do you suppose they could be in communication with Danaan?"

"It's not impossible," said Benarizin. "What do you think, Thorwald?"

PAULSSON pinched his chin and said slowly, "I think this makes a hell of a lot of difference in the alterations we'll have to put in the *Argo*. The key point in approaching a planet, whether it's the place where we stop over or Danaan itself, is the space stations around it, where you transfer for transportation down to the surface. That's where the trap would be if there were one. I don't know about the stopover point, because we haven't even figured out where it will be. But Danaan has two stations, and that's where they'll be waiting for us."

Meyeronen said, "If General Vnadiv is warned, couldn't he take any necessary precautions?"

"Probably," said Paulsson. "Old Bulgarian Lightning can handle any kind of combat situation you could meet on the ground or in the air of a planet. But this is neither one. Just look what would happen if they did try to spring a trap on us at the space station and Vnadiv counter-attacked successfully. We'd have possession of the station—"

The door slid back and Desariza came in, looking as though she had been powdered from head to foot with diamond dust. Her face was thoughtful; she sat down and wordlessly motioned Paulsson to go on.

He said, "But we would also have declared hostile intentions toward Danaan. They could cut us off from the ground by holding out on the ferries, or even send a few guided missiles up at us, and where would we be then? No, we've got to play at co-operating with them."

"I see your point," said Benarizin, "and it's a good one. But how are you going to avoid any welcoming committee they have at the station?"

"By not going there. We'll simply avoid it and make a direct landing on Danaan. Now, wait a minute—" as the other two stirred. "I know that means we can't use an ordinary spherical deep-space ship. The *Argo* will have to be given extra strength members for work in an atmosphere and fitted with wings. It will make her fairly uncomfortable for the crew, but basically that's only an engineering problem and one that's been solved before. Besides, the alterations will lend color to our story of being on a prospecting trip if the question ever comes up."

Benarizin said, "How are you going to account for the fact that instead of going prospecting to some inaccessible part of Danaan, you head straight for the center of civilization?"

"Defectees," said Meyeronen. "Two stories—one for people here, that they're going prospecting. When they get there, they can say that story was only a plant, and what they really want is to hook up with the Danaans."

Benarizin laughed. "You ought to be a conspirator," he said. "Come to think of it, you are one. Now let's have a report from our number one female agent. What about it, Dess?"

"I'm afraid I haven't got a great deal, aside from the fact that Roger Parks is anxious to seduce me," said the girl. "He did let slip one rather curious remark, though. We were dancing at the Blue Cavern when—I don't know how the subject came up, but I'm always trying to steer the conversation in the right direction—I mentioned that shot some-

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body fired through the window of the Temporary Quarters Tower. He said, 'I don't think they'll have to worry about things like that any more—not after the vote of the Council today.' "

"Ve-ry interesting," said Benarizin. "And it confirms pretty well what I was saying earlier, about their anxiety to have you go. Parks knows perfectly well that you and I are working with Meyeronen, even if he can't be sure that you know he's an agent of the Reformers. That means that he's also aware that anything he told you would be repeated here. So this is a kind of green light to us from the Reformer organization. They're telling us to go ahead and see what we can make of it."

"They may have something else, like someone in the Space Commissioner's office to refuse the Captain the people he needs," said Meyeronen.

"I don't think so," said Benarizin. "They haven't used obstruction as a tactic at all. No, they've got something deeper in mind. You had better get your undercover organization, Columbine and Radko and the others, busy on it. In the meanwhile, Thorwald, will you get in touch wtih Arthur Gordon and work out with him the alterations you'll need in the *Argo* to fit her for direct planetary landing in accordance with our new scheme? I can put you in touch with him tonight, if you like. He's over at Spaceport now, waiting to go up in the ferry with the first construction gang."

"Can it wait till morning?" asked Paulsson. "I was rather hoping that after a dose of Roger Van Ellenbogen Parks lasting a full evening, Desariza might be willing to come out and look at the gardens with me."

He got a smile for that one.

V

FROM the speak-box came the report, "Connection broken; ship in orbit, sir."

Thorwald Paulsson, captain of a ship once more, glanced at the screen that showed the green ball of Earth, spinning under its cloudy blanket, touched the announcement switch, and said, "One hour to rocket-firing time. I would like all department heads to meet me for a conference in general assembly."

He sat down next to one of the girders that went spider-webbing across the hexagonal room to give the *Argo* her necessary rigidity for an atmospheric landing. Overhead, tables were bolted to the ceiling which would become the floor when community meals were served, and the side-walls were bumpy with projectors for view-screens and games machines. There was the tiniest trace of vibration from the low-power rockets which would take them clear of Station 3 before the big rockets cut in.

General Vnadiv came in first, a notably big man, with a hard face and the remains of his white hair cropped close to his head. He looked a lot younger than his seventy-eight years, and the combat stars of three wars were on his jacket, but he had left off his decorations. He jerked a little formal bow and sat down without saying anything.

Paul Boone came next, the expert in supersonics. He had the thin, sensitive face of an artist, and greeted the General with, "Glad to see you gain. We haven't been together since that trouble on Calla, have we? Hope this isn't as tough a show as that one."

Dr. Ransom Tanaka, the psychologist whose smooth features betrayed his Japanese ancestry, and Arthur Gordon, the lanky, slow-moving engineer, came in together, laughing and talking, and were followed by Mannstein, the astronomer. Last of all came little Dr. Lowendijk who would have the responsibility for navigating the *Argo* through the trackless wilderness where light-years were briefly wiped out. He had a little pointed beard and was noted for his propensity for bad jokes when not working.

They took their places and the few remarks died. Paulsson faced them. "I think all of you have been aboard Space Fleet ships," he said, "so I won't go into details of how things are operated there, except to say that they're going

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to be different aboard this one. In the Fleet there is a good deal of talk about democracy and some practice of it. I want to say right now that this is a private ship not under official rules, and there isn't going to be any such thing as democracy. Each of you will be in absolute charge of his department, and what he does will be subject only to the approval of the Captain—myself. Is that clear?"

There was a little stir. Gordon, the engineer, said, "Do you have a reason for that, Captain?"

"Yes, I do, and it isn't the unfortunate incident in which I was involved while commanding the *Vermont*. You men here and the other members of the crew, have had no psychological conditioning. Normally, that would be dangerous for a voyage through deep space, wouldn't it?"

He glanced at Tanaka, who nodded.

"Therefore we have to substitute something for the complete co-operation which conditioning gives. That something will be authority, in spite of the fact that it's considered old-fashioned. After all, it serves very well in ground warfare, doesn't it, General?"

Vnadiv said, "That is so."

Paulsson went on, "You want to remember that we're pretty much in the position of a military expedition, but there's only one ship and nobody to co-operate with. Besides, once we arrive, we'll be in quite another position—that of a diplomatic mission. If there is any question, we are to represent ourselves as defectees from the Council of Worlds organization. We'll probably be interviewed individually about that, and we'll have to have individual, not co-operative reasons for defecting. The only thing we can agree on is wanting to get away, not the reasons for it. Any questions?"

Gordon said, "This isn't a question in the sense you mean, but isn't it going to be rather difficult to adjust? I mean for experienced spacemen."

Paulsson had chosen his position in Central Assembly so that the faint acceleration of the low-power rockets seemed to place the others slightly below, where he could look down on them. He said; "Dr. Tanaka will determine the degree of adjustment and suggest any necessary measures. He has complete authority over personnel matters."

THERE was a momentary silence. Then Paulsson went on, "Also, I want it clearly understood that if anyone wants to eat by himself, he may do so—with the permission of his department head. And participation in group games will be voluntary, not compulsory. Any other questions?"

All the others turned to look at Tanaka, but the little psychologist only beamed in his Nipponese way. It was General Vnadiv who spoke, "Yes, I have a question."

"What is it?"

"What for am I here?"

Paulsson took a breath. "As military head of the expedition. That's your department; it includes the indoctrination of the crew in the use of weapons and training to operate together."

Vnadiv shook his head. "This is not enough good. Hand weapons they know already, except for a few who have not been in space. Major weapons we do not have. And what is the use of training in operations together when you are not having the operations? You say once we arrive the mission is diplomatic, that we do not fight. Therefore, there is nothing for me to do but ride in a parade looking like a statue of a hero. This is not what I come for; I do not like being a hero, and would rather sit in my villa at Ruschuk."

He smiled amiably and as Paulsson said "We may meet—" broke in with, "No! I know what you are saying. We have trouble in space, then you are the captain. You shall not tell that to Ossimetz Vnadiv. It is fighting on the ground, where there is an atmosphere, that I came for."

Paulsson turned to Tanaka. "Do you suppose—" he began, but broke off as the hatch in one of the sidewalls opened,

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and a pair of feet, then a behind became visible, pushing through parallel to the floor with that odd floating effect which null gravity gives. The behind was enormous; the feet waved wildly for a moment, then fixed themselves as the magnetic shoes caught a girder, and the rest of the man they belonged to followed.

The group in Central Assembly recognized Bevicharler, the champion heavyweight boxer who had rather unexpectedly applied for a place in the *Argo's* crew. Each of his ham-like hands was firmly attached to the jacket-neck of a rather thin young man, and the pair dangled at right angles to his new direction. "Stowaways, Captain!" said the boxer briefly. "Found them in the hydroponic chamber."

"Put them down," said Paulsson, and as the pair hit the floor with the air of tumblers and jackknifed upright, he tipped a switch. "Captain to control, are you there?"

"Control here."

"Keep her on low-power rockets until I give the word. I've got to conduct an investigation."

He turned to the pair, who were identical to the last eyelash and detail of clothing. "Who are you?"

One of them spoke for both. "We are Halperonik and Harperonik, Halperin family. Here are our numbers and identification." With identical motions, the pair extended their cards.

"What do you think you're doing here?"

Halperonik answered, "We wanted to go on your expedition."

"Why didn't you apply in the regular way? It was publicly announced."

"Because the Institute wouldn't have let us go."

"What Institute?"

"The Rhyne Institute of Parapsychological Study."

Paulsson's eyes darted to Dr. Tanaka. "Can you throw any light on this?"

"Parapsychology isn't my branch, but maybe I can throw a little," said the doctor. "It's been more or less a trade secret—" he giggled—"that the Institute has had these two under observation for some time, with a view to determining the exact nature of their talents and how they could be developed in other individuals. You see, they're espers."

"Espers?"

"Yes. They have so high a degree of extra-sensory perception that they can read most of the thoughts in other minds." He smiled at the pair.

Paulsson turned toward them again. "Is that true?"

They nodded in unison.

"Very well, what am I thinking about now?"

FOR a moment the two faces gazed at him in frowning concentration. Then Harperonik said, "You're thinking we might be spies for—for someone, it doesn't quite come clear, but you see them as a whole group with guns. But we aren't spies for anybody. We just want to go on the expedition."

"Good God!" said Gordon in the background.

The two heads swiveled toward him. Harperonik said, "No you can't."

"Can't what?" said Gordon.

"Send us back in one of the lifeboats. The Captain thought of that, too, and then thought he couldn't spare one because of what the ship might run into. And we hope she won't run off with that Civil Policeman before you get back, too."

Gordon's face abruptly turned a brick red and the others laughed. Paulsson said, "All right, you two. I can still push on to moon base without using up too much fuel and put you off there. But it looks as though you might be useful at that, and I want you to tell me more about yourselves before I come to a final decision. Sit down; if you'll be more comfortable."

The pair seated themselves primly and a little stiffly. Halperonik said, "you see, we're twins. Father and mother both come from the families who have been connected with the Institute for generations because they had so much ESP,

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and the Institute simply trained them like the others, to do the work as well as to be subjects. And then they found out that we had more of it than anybody ever had before, so ever since we were kids, they've been giving us encephalographs, and Prochnitz tests and all that sort of thing. It's all very interesting and important, but we don't want to be specimens—we want to be spacemen."

"The first space-i-men," said Dr. Lowendijk and someone groaned. "Paulsson said, "Laudable ambition. How did you get aboard?"

"Oh, we went out to the Station on the Institute ferry, to take the test ribbons on the last of your crew. Then we simply hung around until off-duty hour when there was only one guard and waited until he had to leave for a minute and slipped in."

"And I suppose you found out where to hide the same way?"

"Yes. When the loads were going aboard, someone thought that the hydroponic unit wouldn't be opened up until we were in orbit, so went in there."

Paulsson lifted his hands. "I give up. What do you think, gentlemen?"

"Most amusing," said Lowendijk. Vnadiv snorted, but not with disapproval. Mannstein said, "With technical training they could be helpful. It is often difficult to co-ordinate the thoughts in one's own mind." Paul Boone, "I should like to conduct a few tests." Gordon didn't say anything.

"Very well," said Paulsson. "Bevicharler, take these two up and give them quarters in D section. They'll have to draw clothes and spacesuits from stores, and be sworn in. Lieutenant Astroth can take care of that; and tell him I want him to work them hard."

Halperonik and Harperonik stood up, but Tanaka said, "Just a minute. There are a couple of points I'd like to clear up. Do both of you have this thought-

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reading ability, or only one? I notice that only one of you told what was being thought."

"It takes both of us," said Halperonik. "You see, it's as though one of us sent some sort of blank beam through the mind of the other person, and it picked up his thought and then the other of us receives it. Usually, I send and he receives, but it can work the other way around. And we can't do too much of it, because it gives us heachaches, and then we can't esp a thing. We were showing off just now to impress you," he finished candidly.

"Oh, that's it," said Paulsson. "All right, Bevicharler, put one of them in section D and the other in section E and tell Lieutenant Astroth to keep them in different watches. That will protect our privacy a little bit. Now, gentlemen, I intend to use high-speed rockets until we reach an orbit between the moon and Mars before going into superspeed. Control, are you there?"

VI

ALDEA was blue. Not the pale blue of an earthly sky, but one deeper and more toward turquoise as it swung around its G2 type sun, with oceans rolling from pole to tropics and continents no more than exaggerated island chains. They spun out beneath the *Argo,* brilliantly tropical green and fantastically indented like the shores of an equatorial Norway as the ship made her third orbit through the thickening lower atmosphere, occasionally firing a burst from the braking rockets.

"Ship *Argo.* Ship *Argo,*" said the communications box. "This is ground control, Coquimbo spaceport. You are one minute too far south. You are one minute too far south. Do you hear me?"

Paulsson said, "One point right rudder," and glanced at the control panel as Lieutenant Astroth flipped a switch and said, "Coquimbo spaceport. This is ship *Argo.* We are correcting. We are correcting."

He closed the switch and turned to Paulsson. "That was a woman, too. I wonder if they all are, in the technical services. They all seemed to be in those space stations, but I suppose you never can tell about the customs of a planet you haven't visited before."

Dr. Lowendijk had come to Control to watch the landing. "There is a planet in the constellation Libra," he said dreamily, "where they even have the custom of moving the lower jaw while eating." Nobody laughed.

Ahead and a little to the right, what must be Coquimbo rose out of the sea at them, an island narrow and of a length that at this low altitude stretched invisibly into the distance ahead. Its nearer extremity held a long swatch of brown clearing through the green, ending in a circle at whose center a space ferry for one of the stations stood tilted upward, poised for flight.

Paulsson said, "I'll take the wheel now," and did so, adjusting the approach with small, precise movements.

Astroth said to Lowendijk, "Did you notice they never went on visual at all? Must be a bunch of terrible looking hags, not to let us want to see them till we get in their clutches."

Lowendijk said, "For one of my age the terrible looking hags look the best. I am not a young buffalo, like you and General Vnadiv."

Astroth grinned. "Well, anyway, the space stations cleared all hands for two days leave aground. The more women the better, provided they're made the right way, and they ought to be in a Chilean colony. Señoritas!" He snapped his fingers.

The runway rushed up at them with its surrounding trees looming gigantic. Under Paulsson's expert hands, the *Argo* slid gently in and slowed to a stop. The Captain touched a switch, said, "Engineering. This is Control. We're aground."

"Okay, Control," came back, and the air exchange vents began their rush at once as Paulsson relinquished the controls and turned toward the exit hatch. Paul Boone moved into the passage be-

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side him, the little black box slung at his side. Very few men could handle the keys as rapidly and delicately as he. "Those espers of yours have been propagandizing me to be part of the landing party," he said.

"Let them wait," said Paulsson. "They're going through the usual reflex in such cases. First they couldn't do anything they wanted to, and now they're doing exactly what they want and in addition, they've got something nobody else has. So it's no wonder they get to feeling a little superior and brash. What they have to learn now is that responsibilities come with powers. In other words, discipline. Seem to have taken a fancy to you, though." He threw the switch that opened the inner air-lock door.

"That's explainable on the same basis," said Boone. "With this box I'm one of the freaks, too. I was playing it for Halperonik yesterday, and he got quite an emotional jag."

Tanaka came through the air-lock door and it swung shut. Aldea was a normal atmosphere planet, but Paulsson had established the normal Space Fleet routine for the sake of security. He threw the outer air-lock switch, adjusted his throat mike, and as the door swung open and the gangstairs let down, led the way to the ground.

A GROUP of three women in uniforms with soft leather boots and flare-hipped jodhpurs awaited them, the leader with a tall comb in her hair that betrayed the Chilean origin of the colony. "Mendillaria," she said, and offered her hand.

"Captain Thorwald Paulsson." The others were introduced. Paulsson said, "Thank you for the permission to allow our crew some leave. May I ask about recreational facilities?"

Mendillaria turned and waved a hand toward a red roof just visible among the giant trees. "The space hostel is there. You will find our arangements a little different from those on Mother Earth. The first colonists did not like either towers or cities, so long low buildings have become part of our culture."

"I didn't mean that exactly," said Paulsson. "I was thinking—"

"Oh, a dinner was arranged for you as soon as you made contact with the stations. Tomorrow afternoon by our time, and companionship will be provided for your people, but we have only a twenty-two hour day here, and your people will need that long to de-condition."

"We're not conditioned. This is a non-service trip."

"Oh." She gave him a long glance, and Paulsson thought he detected a trace of hardness about the pointed oval of her face. Then she picked up her mike and fingered the sets. "Ignaziana," she said, "They're unconditioned. Can you call the assembly for a couple of hours from now? . . . Yes . . . Have Dolorolenda fly in the group from Biobio if the weather in that zone is all right." She turned back to Paulsson, "We will not be wanting in the duties of interworld hospitality."

Paulsson said amiably, "We certainly did not expect that you would," and lifted his own mike to give permission for the first watch and the second section of the third to land. Tanaka was looking at Mendillaria. "You seem to have a great many women in executive positions," he said.

"It is the constitution of our state," she replied. "Ever since—"

One of the others touched her arm and addressed Paulsson, "Do you mind walking as far as the hostel? We have a shortage of mechanical transport on Aldea except for helis, because it's so difficult to build roads."

The outer door of the air-lock opened and the twenty-four men began to come down the steps, headed by Lowendijk and Astroth. Paulsson fell into step beside Mendilleria. "From what I saw of your planet while we were in orbit," he said, "I'd say you had a fair amount of difficulty in raising your food supply agriculturally."

"Yes," she said, "we're mostly tree

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crops and 'ponics. There are a couple of groups of rather flat islands under the tropics where cereals and vegetables do well, and we exchange with them but—" she stopped suddenly.

They were moving down a wide paved path, along whose edges flowering shrubs had been rather recently planted to form a screen against the trees. "But what?" he asked.

"Nothing. We use the islands as penal colonies, you see, and nobody goes there."

The space hostel's red-tiled roof reached out a couple of feet above its flat pink walls, but once inside, its rather inhospitable aspect was relieved by a view through transparent walls at the back toward a colonnade and garden where fountains splashed cheerfully. The reception room was wide and not very well lighted, with colored pots holding flowers everywhere. Doors opened on corridors to left and right, and beyond the fountains other walls were visible. Mendillaria spoke into her mike in a low voice and turned to Paulsson, "I offer you some apology for having only the Coquimbo contingent of companions available," she said. "But you surprise us by not being conditioned. There is nothing you need on the technical side?"

"Only air."

"Then you will excuse me. I have my duties and here are the companions."

Through one of the corridors at the side came four or five girls, not in uniform like those who had met the Argonauts, but definitely dressed to attract, and succeeding. They had the indefinable, unmistakable bearing of women whose profession it is to please men, as Paulsson had encountered it in the hospitality hostels of half a dozen worlds during campaign. He stood up and took two swift steps after Mendillaria. "Will you permit me to come with you and see some of your technical operations?" he asked. "I'll keep out of your way and be quiet. You see, I'm—sort of spoken for, and I don't think I care about companions today."

She turned wide eyes toward him. "You men from Mother Earth are very particular. Don't you want to wait till the heli comes in from Biobio and see whether you can't find anyone more attractive in the contingent from there?"

OUTSIDE, the quick night of Aldea had closed in. In the *Argo's* central assembly, Mannstein the astronomer and General Vnadiv, quite unadjusted to Aldea's twenty-two hour day, faced one another and Paulsson across cups of coffee. The latter said, "You see, she couldn't altogether refuse to answer me, so I kept pressing her. Her explanation was that the war between the Tarapaca and Cautin Island groups was caught by an inspector from the Council, and so Aldea was moved down to second class and lost a delegate."

"That could be true," said Mannstein, and the hatch opened to admit Tanaka with a cup of coffee in his hand, ducking around the furniture that now projected from the side bulkheads.

Paulsson went on, "It is true. I looked up the record. It shows that Aldea was once a first-class planet, moved down to second with a caution for having an internal war."

"Ignoramus of a regulation," said General Vnadiv.

"No doubt," said Paulsson. "The part I find difficult to credit is what comes next. She said that the losses among the male population were disproportionately heavy, and they had practically no choice but to place women in responsible positions. Very good; that's possible. But it doesn't account for the fact that there were no men at all in the control tower. Not one."

Tanaka said, "There weren't any anywhere. The people working around the hotel were all women, too. And the young ladies who received us showed definite symptoms of nymphomania."

"Is good for their profession," said the General.

Paulsson stirred. Tanaka said, "It's c u r a b l e, and on most planets they don't—" and stopped as the Captain held

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up a hand.

"I think that just about completes the picture," he said. "And it's one that I'm not sure that I altogether like. There's something peculiar going on here, something that ought to come to the attention of the Council, and they're concealing it. Did you see any children?" He addressed Tanaka.

"Not personally, but there are some all right," said the psychologist. "We heard them."

PAULSSON frowned. "That's a piece of the puzzle that doesn't quite fit then. But what you say about using women with tendencies of nymphomania as companions fits in with the general pattern of concealment. On most planets I've seen that would be considered subtly insulting to spacemen. But here they offer to de-condition us, and as soon as they find out we're not conditioned, bring out these girls. It's a deliberate program of distraction, and without being able to put my finger on anything precise, I think I was subjected to the same thing."

"What could they be concealing?" asked Mannstein.

"I don't know. Some of the pieces don't fit. But it's a curiously unbalanced society, and the unbalance explains why the Aldea delegates have been voting with the Reformers on the Council."

General Vnadiv said, "We investigate. This is a member planet and they cannot prevent."

Paulsson said, "Decision. We will investigate. The point for investigation will be the Cautin island group, which has been described to me as a penal colony, a statement I don't believe for a minute. Ossimetz, take the big heli and a watch section fully armed and make a take-off about dawn."

The conversation turned to indifferent subjects; the free use of wood on Aldea, the fruits and nuts that formed so large a proportion of their diet, the lack of beaches around their rocky islands, the usual conversation of spacemen on a new planet, until Vnadiv patted his paunch and declared himself for bed.

The morning broke in driving rain with the leave group straggling back. General Vnadiv and his section took off under the streaming skies; the leave men had no complaints, and there was no communication from the spaceport authorities. Paulsson looked at microfilm for a while, one of the old earth-bound stories of the ancient author Kipling, then went to Communications and tried to contact Vnadiv, but the static acompanying the rainstorm blotted out radio. During the short Aldean afternoon the weather began to clear, and there was a call from someone named Viantisené, whose title was Captain of Atacama, asking him to dine with her, which he refused. Vnadiv was still silent.

There was nothing from him by night, either, and Communications said that although the storm had passed, there seemed to be as much static on the air as ever. Paulsson summoned Tanaka and asked for an opinion on the General; could he have been persuaded to throw in with the Aldean women? The psychologist ran Vnadiv's test-chart through the machine and reported that he thought not: the only thing that might move the old general beyond his concept of obligation to the expedition would be a prospect of battle. That made the question solidly one of what he had run into at the Cautin Islands, and posed a command decision, which ought to be made after consulation with other officers according to service regulations. But Astroth was in the ground party and the junior watch officer asleep; Paulsson did not feel like pulling either one from bed, so he made a recording of his intention, slipped to the upper deck and broke out a one-man heli.

Aldea had no natural satellites, but one of the stations was so close that it had the aspect of a small moon against the brilliant stars as he took off. He checked with the *Argo's* Communications unit on both radio and sub-vibratory, set the automatic pilot and relaxed to think about Desariza.

There was something curiously diff-

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ent, on which he could not quite put a finger, between her femininity and that of the Aldeans—and in that difference, whatever it was, lay the clue to the strangeness of the place. It occurred to him that the bright thing to have done would have been to ask for some films on Aldean history, but they would probably have an answer for that one, and it was too late now, anyway.

THE jets of the heli pulsed softly. Far beneath a trail of phosphorescence marked the movement of one of the big surface ships which the Aldeans apparently used for most of their heavy-load traffic. The voice box said abruptly, "Captain Paulsson. Acknowledge."

"Paulsson here."

"Switch in your sub-vibratory, please. We need identification and protection against intercept."

He touched the switch. "On. One-two-three-six, forty-one prime."

"Check. Here is Dr. Tanaka." There was a momentary silence, and the voice of the psychologist came over the air, "Another fact for your collection, Thorwald. I am just back from a trip aground. I can report that with a high degree of probability the Aldeans use artificial insemination on a massive scale."

"I don't see where that fits in."

"Neither do I. You're the captain. Tee-hee." The communication clicked out.

Ahead and beneath, the horizon-line of ocean was broken by a dark shadow which would be an island of some kind. Somewhere down there a point of light appeared, and the voice box said: "Heli on bearing two-three-one absolute, please identify yourself."

Paulsson said, "Captain Thorwald Paulsson, of ship *Argo* from Mother Earth on personal flight. Is the area prohibited?"

Instead of answering his question the voice said, "Transmit picture, please." He realized suddenly that the voice was masculine, and threw the switch that shot his image out along the invisible beam. There was a momentary pause, and the voice at the other end said, "Inspection satisfactory. We will give you a tracer."

On the instrument board screen there appeared, not the representation of the landing area he had expected, but a point of light, slightly low and to the left. He adjusted to bring it center, debated whether he should ask questions, decided against, and the heli swooped down the beam, put out its spring-like legs and landed with a rocking-chair motion. Paulsson stepped out in a circle of soft radiance to face—General Ossimetz Vnadiv.

There were four men behind him with hand-guns which they did not offer to raise. The General stuck out his hand. "I expect you but not so soon," he said. "You wish to see mine principality?"

"Principality? What do you mean?"

"I live here now. We recapture this place for normal living."

The pieces were beginning to fall into place in Paulsson's mind, but he said, "I don't quite understand."

One of the four behind Vnadiv took a step forward and saluted with a snap that would have done credit to the service. "Sir," he said, "General Vnadiv has consented to give us the benefit of his experience. After the Tarapaca war, we —we had a little trouble here, and the women took over most of the governments, and put us on these islands. With the General's help, we've already recaptured Acama, and we think we can make it."

Paulsson addressed Vnadiv. "But this is silly. All these people have to do, now that you've found them, is appeal to the Council of Worlds on the ground that Aldea has set up a sociologically undesirable system. And if you try to change things by violence, the Council is sure to find out, and will take another delegate away from you."

"No," said the General, and his smile was a good deal like a cat's. If there is a delegate lost, that is one less vote for the Reformers. And if the Council upsets this system it does not upset the resentments. The women must be con-

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quered or they will never accept it, and besides, they will enjoy that and not fight too hard. Also, you have no fighting for me to do, and fighting is my business. But do not worry about the large heli and the duty section. They are already flying back. Also, you should take off before dawn, when the fighting starts, and I am sorry to have been leaving you."

VII

THE general alarm pulsed through the ship with its flashing lights and the supersonics that woke even the soundest sleepers with a sense of urgency gripping at their vitals. Paulsson detached his magnetic and slipped into shoes and coverall, all in one motion, and impulsed himself along the passage toward Control. Astroth was at the instrument board; the visiplates were dead with the grey of superspeed, but the danger signal glowed redly and the needles beside it were vibrating violently.

"Tracer beam," said the Lieutenant, somewhat unnecessarily. "Probably two of them."

"We'll have to come out," said Paulsson. "Signal action stations. Lowendijk to Control. Mannstein to the observation bubble."

Astroth's face set a trifle, and one of the calculators caught his breath. "I know," said Paulsson, "it's an unpredicted emergence, and it's possible we'll find ourselves in the center of a blue-white star—but it's the only chance. If we go on to destination, they'll come out before we do and have us cold." He smiled a tight smile as Lowendijk came through the hatch, and without speaking, moved to the calculation board.

"Action stations report ready," said the talker.

"Stand by for emergence," said Paulsson, counted to three under his breath and threw the master-switch. Space exploded around the *Argo* and the visiplates were abruptly filled with the picture of unfamiliar suns. Astroth drew a long breath, and the integrator began to click as Mannstein from observation fed in the co-ordinates by which their position would be determined.

"We've got gravity," said Astroth, reaching out to touch the board which had suddenly become "down." "But not much. I think we're in orbit around that fellow there." He stabbed with a finger.

"Yes, I know," said Paulsson. "The only question is whether they ran past us on super or made an automatic come-out with us."

The board man said, "New point, sir. Thirty-one point four, sixteen, two twenty-six relative."

"That's one of them, all right," said Paulsson, inspecting the board. "Mannstein, get a bearing on him. I want distance and speed."

Lowendijk turned from the integrator. "It isn't positive yet, but the nearest approximation places us in the system of 32 Gemini. M type giant, no planets."

"Very well," said Paulsson. He was watching the visiplate on which the other ship had appeared. "Pirates. I don't think there can be a doubt of it. No one else would have the equipment to come out of superspeed that accurately."

"Another new point, sir," said the board man.

Paulsson said, "Feed the co-ordinates to Mannstein and get a bearing on him. I thought there were two of them."

The integrator continued its steady clicking, and Lowendijk said, "This places us only two solar units from Polska. You can appeal in the name of the Council, and they'll have a warship here in twenty minutes absolute."

PAULSSON frowned. "Decision; no. Polska is a Reformer planet, and I doubt whether pirates could operate this close to it without their being aware of it. I think they've tipped off those two who are after us, and if we appealed, there'd be an error in navigation or something of the kind for just

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long enough to let that pair of beauties knock us off."

The talker said, "Observation reports that the one ahead of us is on rockets, interception course along our orbit, distance one-tenth A. U. Firing range in half an hour absolute."

"They will absolutely fire," said Lowendijk, and Paulsson gurked. "Solid shot on number one," he said. "I don't think they'll use torpedos. Pirates don't want to mess things up."

The talker said, "Observation reports the one astern of us on rockets, interception course along our orbit, speed one-five-two, overtaking course, firing range in half an hour absolute."

"The old squeeze play," remarked Paulsson. "I've seen Admiral Poderjay work it. And they'll have the speed of us too, so they'll be able to conform to our motion. This is anything but good." He spoke to the annunciator. "Numbers three and four, solid shot."

"Observation reports both are globular," said the talker.

"Damn it! I wish we had old Vnadiv here. He always insists he can't do any fighting without solid ground under his feet, but he has the real three-dimensional mind, and he'd think of a way out of this trap. I can't."

For a few minutes there was silence in the control room as those in it watched the distant star around which they were circling, not much larger than the sun would look from Mars, and the twin globes of the pirate ships, with their rockets glowing redly. Then, "Ship ahead is signaling, sir," said the talker.

"Tell them to put it on voice," said Paulsson. "I don't want any secrets aboard the *Argo*. We're all in this together."

AGAIN there was silence while the signal was tapped out. Then a voice came scratchily through the speaker. "Winged ship . . . please kill orbital speed . . . stand by for boarding and inspection."

"By what right?" demanded Paulsson.

"Inter. . . . regulations. We are—"

"I'm damned if I do anything of the sort! This is an authorized mission under authority of the Council of Worlds, and I will be glad to show you my pass on visual."

The communications unit was silent, but there was a pinpoint of light on the globe ahead. Astroth said, "They aren't going to hit us with solids at this range." His voice was tight.

"Number one. Permission to open fire," said the talker.

"Permission refused," said Paulsson. "Our only chance against two of them is close action at a range where we can't miss."

Astroth said, "Beg pardon, sir, but can't we expect damage that would make us land on Polska in that case? And if we land there, wouldn't we be held on one pretext or another and never get to Danaan?"

The globes were becoming larger. The one astern was also pinpointed with radiance. "Would you rather surrender to that pair?" asked Paulsson, "And be set down on a planetoid somewhere without tools? It's the only thing we can do."

The integrator clicked softly in the background as Dr. Per Lowendijk turned, leaning at a slight angle to the orbital gravity on his magnetic shoes. "It is not the only thing we can do," he said. "I have been calculating a course for another thing on my little machine."

The *Argo* swayed slightly, and the talker said, "Enemy's shot both misses, sir."

"Very well," Paulsson answered him, and to Lowendijk, "What's your plan, Per?"

"I read history. Long ago, in the time when there were national governments on Mother Earth and sea-ships were propelled by wind-driven sails, there was a war and a battle in it between an American ship and two English, exactly as we are. The American suddenly made a great deal of smoke and in it backed down and destroyed

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one of the English, then speeded up and captured the other. We can do it. I've calculated the courses."

The little man's jocular manner had dropped away; he was as tense as a transmission-wire. Paulsson felt of his chin for a moment, then snapped, "We'll do it. Set up your course on the automatics, Per, to hook in as soon as we're under power. Forward section."

"Section check," said the speaker.

"At the execute I'm going to give maximum acceleration from forward rockets, throwing us into reverse along orbital course. At the stand-by I want forward water-ejection apparatus at maximum, to function until I pass the word." He swung to Lowendijk. "Between the freezing of that water when it hits space and its reheating in the rocket-blasts, that will give us something like your smoke-clouds."

"Enemy's shot a miss, sir," said the talker. "Forward ship firing again."

Paulsson depressed another key. "Number one, number three load with solid shot. All hands! Hear this! All hands, hammocks for maximum reverse rocket acceleration."

Astroth levered open the compartment that held the hammock webbing, and there was a subdued snapping as the group in Control wove themselves into the webs. Paulsson began to count:

". . . seven—space—eight—space—nine—space—ten. Stand by!"

The forward visiplate was suddenly obscure with snow as the *Argo's* ejected water struck the cold of space.

"Execute!"

WITH a violent jerk they were thrown into their webbing, momentarily gasping for breath, and the forward plate showed the long swords of flame lashing into the artifical snowstorm as the rockets took over. An alarm clashed and there was a light on the board.

"Hit in compartment three," said the talker.

"Damn," said Paulsson. "We can't put damage control on it at this acceleration. Anything else show affected?"

"No, sir. We were traveling in the same direction as the missile, and it's a minimum penetration. Self-sealers operating."

"Observation reports ship astern firing a torpedo, sir."

Paulsson jerked at the controls, the flare of the rockets abrupting took a curve, the globular shape of the ship that had been astern of them suddenly loomed large, and he shouted, "Number one, number three, fire at will!"

At the same moment, he cut the rockets. Those watching the side-plates saw two black, swift-moving specks between them and the illuminated globe; the rockets flashed again and went out. "Fire!" said Paulsson a second time, and once more the tubes flared red curves as the *Argo* went into her dance of avoidance.

"Torpedo appears to have hit the other globe, sir," said the talker, and the others in Control turned to watch the enormous soundless flare of the atomic explosion; as Paulsson worked at the controls, perspiration streaming from his forehead. "Fire!' he shouted again. Dr. Lowendijk chuckled and said, "Too late they learn that more than fishes hide in water."

The speaker was suddenly loud and scratchy with static. "Stop it, for God's sake! We're disabled!"

The rockets flared again briefly. "Check that, Observation," said Paulsson. "We can't afford to take any chances with those rats. I'm going out beyond missile range."

As the *Argo* went into low acceleration, the speaker came on again:

"We need help. Losing air fast. Take us in."

"Observation," said the intercom. "At least three fully penetrating hits, probably four. One right amidships."

"Must have got their main air plant," observed Astroth. Paulsson threw the switch for long-distance speaking and said, "You should have thought of that when you fired a torpedo at us. Not your fault that we're not in the same shape as

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your friends out there. Seal off some compartments; you'll be all right."

"Our navigation room's smashed!"

"We'll give you a course to Polska. No further communication." He cut the switch and turned to Lowendijk. "Calculate it for them, will you, Per. I like the idea of sending them there; the Polskans will have to turn them in as pirates. Down hammocks and let's take stock."

The gravity had disappeared. Evidently they had gone far enough during the brief battle to escape the weak influence of the distant sun, and the men in the hexagonal Control hung at weird angles, each one's floor his own. Paulsson turned to Lowendijk, "Thanks, Per. I ought to recommend you for Commodore; we couldn't have gotten out of that one without your trick, and your calculation." He extended his hand.

Lowendijk said, "But it would not work without you handling the ship. So it takes two of us to make one Commodore, and half a Commodore is a Lieutenant. You are demoted, Captain!"

THE hatch opened and Arthur Gordon came in. "Damage report: compartment three's pretty well wrecked and about half the air-exchange units are smashed. It would have been a lot worse but for one of those stowaways—Halperonik. The shot cracked the automatic door to compartment four, and he got it closed by hand. Almost passed out from lack of air, but he's all right now."

"Well, he wanted to be a spaceman, and I guess he'll suceed," said Paulsson, "I'll congratulate him myself when I see him, but you can tell him to use two names if he wants to from now on out. What about repairs?"

"I've got the hole covered with gel, breathing conditions in the compartment and a structural gang at work on restoring the skins. About two hours absolute for the job. The hard part is the air-exchange units. Most of the chlorophyll in the smashed ones died because we couldn't get the outer skin patched soon enough after the hit, so even if they're repaired, they won't operate. I'm concentrating on repairing those for which we have chlorophyll."

"I see." Paulsson's tone was dry. "How does that leave us for air?"

Gordon shrugged. "Write your own ticket. Not enough to take us to Danaan, or even back to Mother Earth. We can make a short superspeed journey, though."

"Or one on rockets," suggested Lieutenant Astroth. "There's always Polska. I hear the blondes there are exceptionally fine."

"And while you're making time with them we'll be held for investigation and testimony against that pirate," said Paulsson. "The Reformer gang couldn't ask for anything better. Decision: no. Hand me the catalog."

He riffled it out on its roller and stared at it gloomily. "There's one," said Astroth. "No, that's got too much CO_2; they're probably still building vegetation and won't have much chlorophyll to spare."

"And besides, we'd have to run their air through the exchange units we have, which would take absolute time, which we can't spare," said Paulsson. "Ah!"

He halted the roller and indicated a reading with his finger.

"Neu Bayern, German colony," read Astroth. "It's still on colonial status, not yet accepted by the Council."

"But it's agricultural," Paulsson pointed out. "That means they'll have the kind of air and chlorophyll we can use. After Per has finished his calculation and passed it to that cockroach out there, tell him to set a course for Neu Bayern, will you? I'm going up to three and see how things look."

VIII

IN KEEPING with its colonial status, Neu Bayern had only a single satellite station and a single spaceport, located on a long, open flat of sand near where a wide river curved through

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heavy vegetation to a tropic sea. Paulsson, taking over the controls after the first two orbits to put the *Argo* into a landing glide, reflected that the whole planet seemed to be fairly tropical, which was hardly surprising, given its nearness to an F8 type sun. Why Germans always picked this type of planet for colonization was something else again.

"Landing clearance. We'll give you a beam," pronounced the speaker; Paulsson fired a braking blast, put down his wheels and the *Argo* was aground, bouncing slightly on the hard sand. The plates showed a caterpillar-tracked vehicle with a kind of awning over its plastic cabin swinging out from the low flatroofed administration building. Tanaka joined the Captain at the air-lock door. "The twins wish to go aground here," he said, "and I would advise persmission on psychological grounds."

"Halperonik deserves it, I guess," said Paulsson, "after what he did for us in the fight."

"He won't go aground without his twin," said Tanaka, "just as he wouldn't take a double name until Harperonik got one too. And we'll be here at least several days between taking in chlorophyll and making repairs. I would advise it."

"All right, permission granted."

The lock swung open and Paulsson stepped in. On the other side a thin-faced man with a hat that appeared to be made of green leaves waited at the foot of the landing ramp. He greeted Paulsson warmly:

"Glad to see you, Captain. We don't get many visitors here, especially from Mother Earth. What's new in the Council, and can we give you any help with your repairs? The station signaled that you needed them."

"The Council's having its usual troubles, and the only help you can give us is to supply us with some chlorophyll. We lost a good deal of ours from the air units when we had a brush with pirates. The labor can be handled by our own crew."

"Chlorophyll is something Neu Bayern will never be without. Unfortunately. Anything else?"

"Yes. We're a prospecting ship with an unconditioned crew. Permission for leave parties during our stay if it doesn't conflict with your regulations."

"This was anticipated when the station reported the shape and name of your ship. A banquet has been prepared, and guests from the settlements invited, although we live simply here."

The air-lock door opened behind Paulsson and Mannstein and Lowendijk came out, followed by the leave watch, including the twins. The young man bowed, clicked heels and said, "Bartgenstein, Authorized Introducer. Will you have the goodness to enter the ground car?"

The heat of sand and sun gave place to the comfortably conditioned car. As Paulsson seated himself beside Bartgenstein a sudden flash of something brilliant, as though the sun had caught a mirror, came from the edge of the tall banana-like trees at the side of the field. "What was that?" he asked.

"Probably an alveole."

"Alveole? I thought that meant a pit."

"It used to," said Bartgenstein. "An example of how language changes on, such an island world as ours. They are part of our local fauna—very intelligent and co-operative, just sub-human. They spend a good deal of their time digging holes to find food. Hence the name."

"And the flash?"

"Their skins secrete some of the hard metals. They also have electrical organs. Interesting species. We'd have difficulty bringing this place under control without them."

The car swung round some of the banana-like trees, dipped down a track and into a marsh with a squashing of caterpillar treads. Mannstein said, "Your road system needs improvement."

"Why so?" said Bartgenstein. "Most of our long-range traffic is by air and the ground cars are better for getting

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around the plantations than it would be to build roads. You are to remember that we are still colonial, with only one industrial area, which limits the number of our products."

THE car rose from the marsh onto a plaza of the same hard sand that formed the landing field. There had been some attempt to beautify the place with formal flower beds and hedges of broad-leaved shrubs arranged in rows, but they did not appear to be thriving. Beyond the plaza massive piers supported the roof of a building that seemed to be all one porch except for scraps of partitions that ran here and there, and off at one side of it was a landing field well populated with helis. Bartgenstein waved a hand. "Our reception building," he said. "After the banquet there will be trips to the plantations, also sports."

The partitions were evidently movable. Before Paulsson could say anything more one of them slid back and as the ground car flourished to a stop, a group of people came out, men and women together. Bartgenstein rose and faced the interior of the car. "You give your names to me and then I will make the acquaintance," he said. "Thus it is official according to our regulation."

"It would be in a German colony," whispered Paulsson to Lowendijk as they followed the Authorized Introducer to the ground, and the professor whispered back, "And Sauerkraut will be the official banquet dish."

The inhabitants of Neu Bayern had formed a precise line, quite unlike the disorderly group of earthmen. Bartgenstein took Paulsson's arm and steered him to the head of the formation. "Captain Paulsson," he said, "Manteuffelier, Chancellor." Manteuffelier was tall and broad-shouldered, but almost as thin as the official greeter. He ducked a little bow, and swung into step beside Paulsson, leading the way through the maze of partitions.

The Captain said, "Your style of architecture seems well suited to the climate, but I should think it might give you trouble when it rains."

"Oh, we have walls that let down for rains. But it is not for the climate that we make so much trouble. It is because of the alveoli."

It seemed odd to see a little group of three chairs and a table with reading-masks on it that obviously belonged in a corner of a room standing in the open. "The alveoli!" said Paulsson. "Why?"

"We live with them in symbiosis. They are the most important fact of Neu Bayern. Unless you take the anthropocentric view." He glanced at Paulsson as though this were supposed to be either a quip or a profound remark. "Therefore it is correct to behave well to them. They are unfortunately inherently claustrophobic, and cannot stand confinement within four walls for even a brief space of time. So that if we wish their cooperation we must have open rooms."

HE LED Paulsson around a wall like a Japanese screen, and they were in a banquet-room with a huge U-shaped table of heavy wood in the old earth fashion at the center. The broken wall at one side allowed a view out over greenery toward a mountain blue with distance. Along the back wall at the foot of the table were ranged as curious a group of humanoids as Paulsson had ever seen.

They were about three feet high with dark, leathery skins on which little bright striations of metal showed; had the oversize heads of small children and bright beady eyes, but with no visible ears, and were decked with belts from which dangled various instruments. Chancellor Manteuffelier raised his hand, and one of the creatures came trotting clicking across the floor to utter a series of pipings in a pitch so high that Paulsson could only catch an occasional note.

"This is Glucki," said the Chancellor. "He is their king. In honor of your visit he will serve you in person."

Glucki reached up a hand with three fingers ornamented with powerful claws and an opposite thumb that seemed ca-

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pable of swiveling right back to the wrist, and touched Paulsson on the arm. "I am honored," said the Captain. "Will you tell him so?"

"Oh, that is all right," said Manteuffelier. "He can understand you, but our ears are not adapted to the sound of their language. Glucki, show him the writing."

The alveole whipped a pad of paper from his belt and curling his thumb around a writing instrument, printed *Pleasant visit* in staggering capitals. "I'm sure you will make it so," said Paulsson diplomatically. Glucki grinned pleasure and ran back to join the other members of his race as Manteuffelier clapped his hands for attention and called, "Now we go to the table."

Bartgenstein bustled around, placing the guests, alternately an earthman and a citizen of Neu Bayern. Paulsson found himself between Manteuffelier and a flaxen-haired, rather pretty woman named Knockhauserin. She was thin-faced like the others. More to make conversation than anything else, he said, "You must work hard on Neu Bayern. I see that nobody gets time to put on weight."

"It's the diet," she said, "We have no starches. The doctors say this is not good, but what can one do?"

Glucki touched Paulsson's arm again and thrust in front of him a plate on which leafy vegetables mingled with slices of unfamiliar fruit.

"No starches at all? Not even potatoes or wheat?" he asked, sampling. It was delicious.

From the other side Manteuffelier said, "For us of the younger generation, those are only words in a dictionary. Neither potatoes nor wheat will grow on Neu Bayern."

"That's strange. I thought modern agronomy had developed strains that would allow almost anything to be grown in any soil or climate."

"It is not a question of soil or climate. Neu Bayern is beautiful, but it is infested everywhere with a species we call root-worms. They destroy all species of grain and root vegetables, even many flowers. Now it is the turn of those on the plaza in front of this building."

Paulsson's plate was removed and replaced with one bearing an excellently cooked fish in a sharp sauce. He said, "But it shouldn't be beyond human ingenuity to find a means of controlling a pest like that."

"Ah! it is not so simple," said the Chancellor. "These root-worms are the principal, one might almost say the only, food of our good friends the alveoli. If we exterminate them in an area, the alveoli depart, and then what do we do for labor?"

KNOCKHAUSERIN said, "You see, Captain, even on our plantations we must have the alveoli. They have very acute ears with a range many times ours, and when a concentration of root-worms takes place, they can hear them at once and dig them up. So for the present we live on a diet which has no starch."

"And little meat," Manteuffelier sighed. "We cannot raise cattle because of the lack of grains, although pigs, yes, we have them and some of the hybrid grazing forms from planets like Santa Eulalia."

"I should still think—" began Paulsson, but was interrupted by a burst of laughter from down the table, as one of the twins, then the other, was convulsed with mirth. "You had better share the joke," he said, a trifle severely. "Have you been spying on someone's thoughts?"

"Uh—only the little man," said Harperonik, jabbing a finger toward Glucki. "Dr. Tanaka told us not to read people, so we promised and didn't. But these aren't people, so it's all right, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Paulsson, "but we still want to know what's so funny."

Harperonik addressed Manteuffelier; "Sir, he is thinking what a fool you are to believe what you say, and laughing inside, and that all men are fools to think the—the little men work for them, when it is *they* who work for the little men!"

The Chancellor swung suddenly to Paulsson. "Is this true? Can they read

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the minds of the alveoli?" In the background there was a sudden outburst of piping from the creatures, and one of them dropped a dish.

"They can read human minds, all right," said the Captain, "and I suppose they can probably pick up these creatures, too."

Manteuffelier leaped to his feet and banged his fist on the table as the alveoli started to edge around the end of the nearest partition. "Down walls!" he shouted. "Glucki, come here. And you two also. I will have the bottom of this!"

The place was suddenly darker as the outer walls closed down and the alveoli gathered in a little, agitated, whistling group, pushing against each other and glancing around fearfully. Glucki advanced slowly, his face sullen, his fingers picking at his belt. The twins ranged themselves on either side of him.

"Is this true?" demanded Manteuffelier. "Do you consider humans as your servants?"

The king of the alveoli fumbled for his pad, but Halperonik said, "Sir, if you'll just ask him questions, we can tell what he's thinking even before he answers."

Harperonik said, "He's wondering how he can explain so you will believe him, and not break the—the treaty, I think it is. And he's rather angry at us, and afraid of being shut up."

"Ah, so?" said the Chancellor. "My friend, there will be a new treaty and you will be very much shut up unless you learn who is in control. Now you will tell us how it is that humans work for you."

Harperonik said, "He's trying not to think about it, sir, but I get it that it's because you put out plantations where they can raise something. It comes through like worms."

Manteuffelier gave a kind of growl. Around the table every eye was watching him, and in the background the other alveoli were uttering squeals so near the edge of audibility that they hurt the ears. The Chancellor said, "Then the things we grow on plantations are most favorable for root-worms, no? I begin to see. And what plants are least favorable for root-worms?"

Harperonik said, "Sir, there's a picture in his mind, but it isn't quite clear. It's something his grandfather told him about, and it looks rather like a field of tall grass."

"Grain!" snapped Manteuffelier. "It is so, no?"

"He doesn't know," said Harperonik.

Paulsson said, "If I may put in a word here, Chancellor, I think I see the point. If these root-worms are what I think they are, they'd naturally prefer plants with large, soft roots, like potatoes. They wouldn't attack the small roots of anything like grain unless they were deliberately induced to, somehow. So I think your alveoli must have deliberately driven out the grains so you would plant things that would provide root-worms for them."

"I think so likewise," said Manteuffelier, and turned to Glucki, who had been overtaken by a violent fit of trembling. "Pig! You are not to blame for what your ancestors have done, but I should lock you and your whole people up in rooms without any windows to teach you not to laugh at human beings. But now there is a new treaty, and you shall write it out. You will not infect grains with root-worms. Write!"

Harperonik said, "He thinks that his people will not live as well as they did before, but it will still be better than before the humans came."

The alveole's writing instrument flew across the pad. Manteuffelier said, "Up with the walls, and you two may return to your places. We will resume the banquet."

He sat down, but as the flood of light streamed into the hall, it was followed by a rush of feet, and round the corner of the partition came streaming half a dozen of the *Argo's* crew with weapons in their hands and Gordon at their head. "Are you all right, Captain?" blurted the engineer.

"Certainly. Having the time of my life. Why shouldn't I be?"

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"All reception from the throat mikes went dead, and so did the radionic tracers."

Manteuffelier barked a laugh. "The alveoli! Did anyone tell you, Captain, that they have electrical organs, and when they become excited they can interfere with almost any type of impulse? They are useful creatures when kept under control. You think I was harsh with them, no? It is because of a doctrine worked out by one of our philosophers, according to which it is necessary to exert authority over races in proportion to their barbarism. Now the little Glucki will think I am a great lord and serve me faithfully, and when we reach member status, I will have our delegate propose the doctrine to the Council. It seems to me that the Council makes too much of what they call democracy, but is not really democracy, only the will of someone who has persuaded many others to let him take charge of everything."

It occurred to Paulsson not only that he agreed, but that it was the reason he was on this trip.

IX

THEY can't have missed detecting us," said Astroth. "I'm not sure that I like it, Captain."

"Nobody asked you to," said Paulsson. "I only wish we had old Vnadiv here. Damn it, we can't keep orbiting over their confounded planet indefinitely."

Mannstein the astronomer, who had come up to Control after being relieved at his instruments, said, "When we play chess, it is often that we make a waiting move, not advancing the game, but giving the opponent a chance to make a mistake."

The speaker said, "Observation to Captain: We have just passed a coastline with shallow water to eight hundred yards offshore."

"That's it, then," said Paulsson. "If they aren't going to take any notice of us, we'll ignore them, too." He flipped switches and pressed buttons. "All hands, stand by for a water landing. Hammocks. Observation, I'm going to make a sea approach and a pass at that coastal area. Feed the current co-ordinates into my board."

As Astroth brought out the webbing, the *Argo* nosed upward over a sea just beginning to be touched with a violet twilight, and swung round in a graceful curve, now heading down and toward the dark green line that marked a shore set with the lush vegetation of Danaan. There was one sharp blast from the forward rockets, bringing plumes of steam from the water beneath; then she slid down, touched as Paulsson fought the controls and those aboard were flung like dolls in their shock-webbing, and the side visiplates were obscured with rainbow spray and slid to a halt.

"Engineering," said Paulsson. "We're aground on water. Break out a head anchor, and as soon as the drift carries us around into a position for a water take-off, I want a stern anchor, too."

Mannstein said, "Now you have made your move. We will see what they do."

The speaker observed, "Communications to Captain. Someone appears to be calling us on terrestrial magneto circuit."

"Tune in and pipe it here, with a reply circuit," said Paulsson. The ship had a slight tilt with the prow higher; Astroth put away the webbing, and with a click the terrestrial mag circuit came on:

". . . hear me? Winged ship in water landing at Derg Bay, do you hear me? Winged ship . . . ."

Paulsson said into the transmitter, Winged ship *Argo* from Mother Earth. We hear you."

There was a momentary silence. Then, "Winged ship *Argo*. This is a semi-closed planet. Are you official visitors?"

"Semi-official," said Paulsson. "Prospecting license."

"Are you in distress or in need of repairs?"

"No distress. No repairs needed. Lawful business."

"Winged ship *Argo*, you are in a closed area. Request you do not land.

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Co-ordinates of areas open to prospecting will be furnished to you."

Paulsson said, "This is a special prospecting job. Request interview with your Council as to details."

"We have no Council. This area is under the authority of Boss O'Connell of Tara."

"Well, then, request personal interview with Boss O'Connell of Tara."

AGAIN a pause, but it was evident that Boss O'Connell of Tara could not be too far from the other end of the communicating system, because it was only a minute before the reply came:

"What is your reason for requesting interview?"

"If I could put it on the air, I wouldn't need a personal interview."

Another gap. The speaker said, "Interview granted. Take a heli vertically upward from your ship and we will give you a beam. You are to bring not over three aides. Out."

Paulsson swung round. "Astroth, get a heli on the upper skin, will you? No sense in delaying. Three aides—hmm." He touched a switch. "I want Dr. Tanaka with Halperonik and Harperonik to report to the heli on the upper skin. There will be no, repeat no, landings until we return from our present mission. Dr. Lowendijk is appointed deputy commander in my absence, with authority to take off if, in his judgment, the occasion demands it."

The compartment door slid open and Gordon, the engineer came in. "Captain," he said, "I'd like you to change your decision not to let anyone land until you get back. Some of my people didn't get a chance to get out on Neu Bayern because there was so much work to do, and they feel pretty badly about it. We could put them out in a boat and let them do some fishing, so they wouldn't really be landing."

Paulsson shook his head. "We're in a place where they'll take advantage of any technicality. Can't be done."

The engineer's face became a trifle sullen. "At least assemble the department heads and submit it to them. That would be the democratic thing to do."

Paulsson gazed at him for a moment, then said, "Arthur, I told everyone publicly at the beginning of this trip that we were effectively on a war mission, and since we're not conditioned, there's going to be no such thing as co-operation or democracy aboard. This is authority. I order that no one is to land under any conditions, and I expect Dr. Lowendijk to enforce it. That's all."

He swung through the hatch and up the ladder.

Tanaka and the twins were already waiting in the heli as he reached the upper skin of the ship, which was swing-

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ing lightly to the slow roll of the ocean under Danaan's deepening twilight. The machine buzzed and leaped; it could not have been over six hundred meters up when the red flashing light began to appear on the instrument board. Paulsson set the drive for automatic and turned to face the twins. "I've brought you two along because we're going to be dealing with a pretty slippery customer," he said. "At this first interview I want you just to pick up what you can. Don't say a word unless you catch it that he's going to try physical violence or something like that, but save it up and report to me after we get back to the ship. Understand?"

They nodded together. Halperonik said, "Whom shall we read?"

"Absolutely everyone we come in contact with."

Below them the darkening tangle of trees might have been a jungle except that they mostly looked like temperate zone forms, giant conifers and others with long slender branches and small leaves. Some distance ahead, where the slowly rising ground pitched up to a range of low hills, lights were visible through the foliage. This was evidently their destination; the trees gave back as they approached, to show fields rimmed with hedges, then suddenly sprang apart to show a group of connected three-story buildings. Tanaka said, "What's that on the roof?"

Paulsson followed his pointed finger. "I see what you mean. Looks like a projector all right, and I'll bet they have the *Argo* bracketed in. This place must be a regular fortress."

The heli sailed over the buildings and the light on the instrument board snapped out as Paulsson touched controls to set her down. They were in a wide courtyard with light flowing across it, enclosed on all four sides by buildings. Those at the rear seemed to be industrial, for they were windowless and a subdued rumbling issued from them. As Paulsson stepped out, he was accosted by two men in uniforms that showed the bulges of armor and with hand-weapons. One of them said, "Captain of the winged ship *Argo*? This way, sir. The Boss is waiting."

HE LED the way, walking beside Paulsson, while the other guard took up a position at the rear of the little procession. A door slid back at their approach; there was a quick, silent flash from ceiling and wall as they passed through, which informed the Captain he had been inspected for concealed weapons. The guard led them down a long paved hall, touched open a side door, said, "Captain of the winged ship *Argo*," and stepped aside. A tall man wearing old-fashioned spectacles stood up, looked at the arrivals as though they might be

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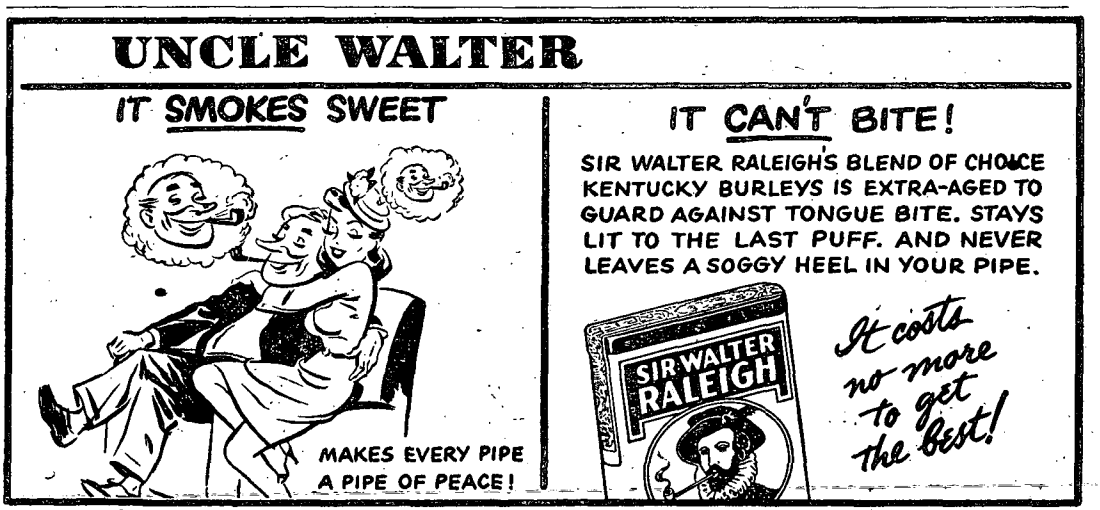
UNCLE WALTER
IT SMOKES SWEET
MAKES EVERY PIPE A PIPE OF PEACE!
IT CAN'T BITE!
SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF. AND NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE.
SIR WALTER RALEIGH
It costs no more to get the Best!

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specimens, opened an inner door and repeated, "Captain of the winged ship *Argo*," and stood aside.

They were in a room that might have been the hall of an ancient castle, with dark paneling, a quaint fireplace at one end, and heads of animals on the walls. A man with just a suggestion of a sideburn got up from behind a desk and came trotting across the floor toward them.

"Well, well, well," he said, "it's a real pleasure now to see someone from Mother Earth after all these years. I'll not be knowing you, will I?"

Paulsson accepted the proffered hand. "I'm Captain Paulsson, and this is Dr. Tanaka and Halperonik and Harperonik of my crew. I take it you're—er—O'Connell."

"Mike O'Connell is my name, and Boss is my title, since I'm the Boss of Tara and this is Tara Hall. And I got my second name in an honest way on space runs. Will you sit down now, and have something to drink?"

He waved toward a semi-circle of antique chairs around the fireplace, led the way to one himself and squeezed the signal stick that projected from the floor beside it, five times. "Did you have an easy trip out, Captain?"

"All except for a little trouble with space pirates off Polska," said Paulsson. "The reason I wanted to see you—"

O'Connell waved a hand. "It can wait. I'll not talk business without my daughter, Deirdonnell, who can see farther into a block of steel than most people can into a pool of water."

Something clicked behind Paulsson. He turned to see that a section of the paneling had slid up from the bottom, and an automatic butler with five drinks on a tray came trundling smoothly across the carpet, dodged around his chair and came to a halt beside him. He helped himself to one of the drinks. "Very ingenious," he observed.

"Oh, we have good engineers in Tara," said the Boss. "The best in the galaxy, I say; it's the old Irish blood in them." The automatic butler moved rapidly from one to another, discharging its load, and Boss O'Connell lifted his glass, "Here's mud in your eye and the Devil to pay!"

They drank. Paulsson did not hear the door open, but caught a light footfall, and as he set his glass down she was standing there.

He got slowly to his feet with the sensation of having been caught in a rocket blast. Was it the reddish-blonde hair, or the fact that she stood eye-level to eye-level with him, or the perfect oval of her face around red lips that parted a trifle? Was it—

"This is my daughter Deirdonnell," the Boss said from an immense distance. "Captain Paulsson."

The eyes were green. Paulsson tried fleetingly to recall the image of Desariza, tried to look away or remember something that it was no use to remember, and suddenly drowned in those eyes, suddenly aware that no matter what happened and forever, there would be no others for him.

"A pleasure," said Deirdonnell. Her hand came up rather slowly to meet Paulsson's. Boss O'Connell cackled a laugh: "When you two are through admiring each other like a pair of peacocks, we'll get to business," he said.

PAULSSON sat down slowly, feeling as though he were shaking inside, utterly unable to take his eyes off her in spite of a small sound from Harperonik. O'Connell, suddenly businesslike, said, "Now, Captain, will you be telling me why, instead of going off to prospect where there's prospecting to be done, you're here drinking my liquor and taking up my time?"

Paulsson felt his face flush, but he kept his voice steady, "You can define prospecting in different ways. I thought that before going looking for metals, I might look into the prospects of doing something for you."

"And what made you think you could, now?"

"Well—" Tanaka abruptly came to his rescue. "Captain Paulsson is an ex-

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perienced officer in the Space Service, with an outstanding record. He commanded a wing in the battle off the Horsehead nebula."

"Oh, he did, did he? Why isn't he tending to his business in the Service?"

Deirdonnell stirred, and the movement sent a thrill up Paulsson's spine. "Father," she said, "I think you're too hard on him. There may be some reason—"

"I was court-martialed and suspended —for doing something I'd do every time."

"I had not heard of it." O'Connell's voice sounded a trifle mollified. "But why come here?"

"I'll tell you frankly. I was told you had national governments on Danaan. Now where there are national governments, there are pretty well bound to be wars, and it occurred to me that there might be an opening for someone with military experience, particularly if he brought his own ship."

O'Connell shook his head. "Six months ago you'd have been as welcome as a new pair of shoes, but the biggest of our troubles, that's with Lougheda in the south, is all dead and done with now. The treaty is by way of being signed. My daughter Deirdonnell is going to marry the Boss of Lougheda, and Tara and Lougheda will be one country."

Paulsson experienced a sense of shock but Deirdonnell said, "Father, there's Kerrymore."

He darted a quick glance at her. "So there is, so there is. You think, then, that we should take up the Captain's offer?"

"Yes, I do. Even the fact that he's with us might help keep the Kerrys quiet."

"Bad luck to them!" said the Boss and turned to Paulsson. "What kind of a ship do you have?"

"A Class IV, with a medium speed spin-room."

"What armament?"

"We don't carry torpedoes, but we can adapt for them. Four turrets."

"What kind of rockets, now?"

"We have chemical for low-power operation. Uranium pile and methane working fluid for high speed."

Deirdonnell reached over and touched her father's arm. "I think we should," she said. "You know, Captain, this is a rather peculiar planet."

Tanaka said suddenly, "If you are hesitating about telling Captain Paulsson of the neptunium-237 on Danaan, you may save the trouble. He knows about it already, tee-hee."

"He does, does he now?" said O'Connell. "And I've no doubt he knows about the little motor we've been building with it. That's the way news gets around the galaxy these days. Well, well, I'll take you in my service, I will, and I'll give you a Commodore's pay and perquisites. But I'll make three conditions with you—" He held up three fingers and began ticking them off. "One: you will resign from the service and send your notice to the Council by the first communication. Two: you will let my mechanics install one of our neptunium motors aboard. Three: you will take one of our communications officers into your crew. Do we make it a deal?"

Paulsson's face felt a trifle strained. "It's a deal," he said. "Now what about land leave for my crew?"

X

THE supersonics pulsed through the ship. "There will be a meeting of all department heads in Central Assembly in fifteen minutes, at twenty-three forty-five, local time," said the annunciator. "Repeat: all department heads to Central Assembly."

Paulsson put his empty coffee-bulb back in the rack and observed, "I would judge that it's really raining hard out there now."

"I stopped at Observation," said Dr. Tanaka. "They report that the atmosphere has a high carbon dioxide content, and there are probably a good many volcanoes."

"I know," said the Captain. "We passed some in orbit, along the edge of that eastern continent."

Mannstein came in as he was speaking.

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"The temperature seems equable enough, though. And I noticed that the ice-cap was very small. Just about what you'd expect from a young world. I noticed that most of the trees we could see are primitive types. Wonder what their animal life is like?"

"It concerns me less than the human life at present," said Paulsson. "Hello, Per. Sit down and join us, Arthur."

Paul Boone came in, ducking under one of the tables that had become suspended from the ceiling with the *Argo's* assumption of planetary gravity. "I can't detect any trace of supersonic vibration," he said. "It's just possible they don't have the long-range type. After all, they've been cut off for several years absolute, and it's rather new."

Paulsson glanced round. "Are we all here? All right, I want to open this session by saying that I haven't discussed the result of our visit even with Dr. Tanaka or our two espers here. I wanted you all to hear it and to get the benefit of your collective ideas, because any way you look at it, the situation is pretty delicate. We went to Tara Hall, which I would describe as a combination living and industrial unit, well-defended. They have projectors there, and one of them was pointing in the direction of this ship. We were met by armed guards, who took us to see a man who calls himself Boss Mike O'Connell—"

"Spaceman?" asked Boone.

"He claimed to have got his second name in the usual way. He received us very cordially, but wouldn't talk at all until his daughter, Deirdonnell came in. She's rather a number, by the way." Tanaka giggled, and Paulsson shot him a warning glance, then went on. "I was inclined to believe that his cordiality was merely to put us in a good mood, and when he said he never decided anything without his daughter, he was telling the truth. What do you think, Ransom?"

"That was my impression," said Tanaka. "But I think I'd rather have it checked by our espers."

Harperonik nodded. "Yes, sir. He expected you, and—"

"He *expected* us!" said Paulsson. "Why, they tried to keep us from coming!"

"Yes, sir. He expected you, and he had some plan for dealing with you, but he hadn't worked out the details and was waiting for his daughter to come and help him plan it. He thought she was better than he was about that sort of thing. And he was unfriendly." Harperonik shuddered a little. "Wanted to kill us all."

Paulsson rubbed his chin a little, thinking of the girl with a feeling compounded of anger and regret. "It's no more than we could expect," he supposed. "But I'm surprised at his expecting us. That sticks with me a little bit. How could he know that we were coming and who we were?"

DR. LOWENDIJK said: "When you have a problem that no logic can answer, it means only that you have not put in enough elements. It is so with the calculating machines. Now let us put in one more little element: suppose the Reformers sent him a communication telling him we were coming. Wouldn't it explain why they were willing to let us go, and also why we were expected? Presto!" He spread his hands.

"By George, I believe you're right!" said Paul Boone, as Paulsson swung to the twins. "Is that possible?"

Halperonik and Harperonik glanced at each other. "It could be, sir," said the latter. "That is—we didn't catch anything against it. It's sometimes awfully difficult for us to be sure. Especially when we don't know the background."

"All right," said Paulsson. "Then we can take it he was somehow warned that we were coming, maybe only by their space station—no, wait, the station would only have told him we were in a landing orbit, and we might just as easily have made contact with one of the other nations here. There's something that doesn't fit. And as soon as the girl suggested it, he was perfectly

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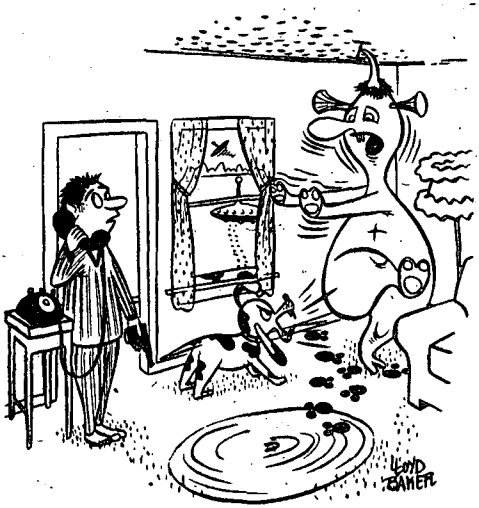
willing to take us into his service to help fight some people called the Kerrys of Kerrymore. Even owned up that he had the neptunium motor, and said he was going to install one aboard the *Argo*. I tell you, it doesn't fit at all with the idea of killing us off."

Tanaka said, "I got the idea that he defers greatly to his daughter, and when she suggested co-operation with you, he fell in with the idea at once—issuing a warning that she was going to marry one of the local potentates, tee-hee. A



"This is Baxter, next door—and if you can't keep that mutt quiet, I'm coming over in two minutes with a baseball bat!"

man can change his mind. They often do."

"What about it, you two," said Paulsson. "Did he?"

The twins exchanged glances again, and then Harperonik said, "We couldn't quite tell, sir. That's why we almost said something. You see—"

"What do you mean?"

Harperonik shifted his feet. "You see, it's this way, sir. When anyone has a really strong emotion, you know, the kind that almost makes you go blind, so you can't hardly imagine anything else, we get it, but it sort of blacks out everything, so that that's all either one of us gets."

"And there was one of these—emotional currents going around?" said Paulsson, swallowing at the thought that if the espers had spotted his instant and terrific reaction to Deirdonnell, the rest of them might as well know about it now and make any allowances necessary.

"Yes, sir," said Harperonk. "She fell in love with you the first time she saw you, and couldn't think of anything else."

Mannstein guffawed, Paul Boone slapped his knee, and Tanaka giggled. "She *what?*" said Paulsson.

"She fell in love with you, sir. She couldn't think of anything else. We both got it." He glanced at his twin, who nodded. Paulsson's mouth came open a trifle; he experienced a dizzying shock of purest delight, accompanied by the vaguely disturbing thought that he was an old pattern of something long since dead and gone, then followed by the hammer-blow thought, but she's going to marry the Boss of Lougheda!

HE CAME OUT of his momentary reverie to find the others staring at him. Tanaka said quietly, "It seems to me, Captain, that this it not only a good explanation for what we have seen, but offers the way out of our troubles."

"How do you mean?"

"The obtuseness is deliberate, therefore I do not notice it. The plan is simple. You make love to this girl; her father thinks so highly of her that any plans against you will be canceled, or if she is to make them, will not be made. Then at the correct moment, and in safety, we leave."

"Good plan," grunted Mannstein.

Arthur Gordon said, "What do you mean by the correct moment? After they have installed the neptunium motor in our ship?"

"Certainly," said Tanaka, "and before they involve us in any operation against another nation on this planet—or even against another planet. That

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would put us outside the law."

"Then I object," said Gordon. "The main objective of this trip is to get Captain Paulsson reinstated in the service with full chances of promotion. What do you think his chances would be if it came out that he betrayed his hosts' confidence like that? Also a girl who was in love with him?"

Tanaka said: "The hosts who are trying to betray him!" Mannstein added, "Politics is too practical for nice fingers."

Paulsson felt as though fingers were tearing him to pieces inside; the thought of making love to Deirdonnell merely to get the motor from her suddenly mingled with the thought of Desariza waiting for him.

Gordon said slowly, "It is not a matter of nice fingers, as you call it. I came on this expedition because I believe in some old-fashioned things like honesty and democracy, and I want to see them win out over what the totalitarian Reformers are trying to do. And if we behave like this, we're being just as arbitrary and dishonest as they are. I think the only way we can get the neptunium motor is by an honest treaty of some kind."

Mannstein said, "You would fight by first laying down all weapons. My friend, you are a little child. It is also wrong to kill people, but with those pirates we had to do it."

"All the same," said Gordon, "I think we ought to vote on this. And I think that since Captain Paulsson is involved, he shouldn't vote."

Paulsson's throat was dry. He said, "Arthur, I've told you at least once before that I'm not the chairman of a meeting here. I'm the Captain of this ship, and if anything goes wrong, the responsibility is mine; and I can't duck it by saying I was overruled by my department heads. But you're right when you say that something more than technical decision are involved, and I think I'll let you have your vote, just to show you where matters stand. Dr. Lowendijk, you're the senior officer behind me. What's your opinion?"

"My opinion is that Mr. Gordon spins a cobweb to hang himself with—and us also. I am in favor of Tanaka's plan."

"How about you, Dr. Mannstein?"

"You know my opinion. The Tanaka plan."

"Mr. Boone?"

"I admire Arthur's honesty, but I doubt the intelligence of his arrangement."

"Dr. Tanaka, do you still think as well of your plan?"

"Even more so, tee-hee. There is no other."

PAULSSON faced Gordon. "You see? The vote appears to be unanimously against your point of view. I'm the one who has to carry it out, and I may say that I'm not too happy about it, but there it is. If you can make any alternate suggestion that stands a chance of success, or if you can suggest anyone who could take my place—"

Gordon's face was slightly flushed. "I protest the vote," he said. "You worked down from the senior officer, instead of beginning with the junior as you should. I—"

The announcer suddenly blared with, "Communications to Captain. Communications to Captain."

Paulsson stepped across and threw the switch. "Communications: this is Captain Paulsson."

"Large float heli landing alongside. Voice connection says it is from Tara with crew to install neptunium motor. Asks that we rig out two fifty-ton cranes and indicate section where new motor will be taken aboard."

"I'll be right up," said Paulsson. "Arthur, this seems to be a case for your ministrations." He stood up as the engineer somewhat slowly made his way to the hatch, but Dr. Tanaka laid a restraining hand on his arm, and as the others filed out, said in a low voice, "I wish there were some way to put him under conditioning. In my opinion he shows evidence of dangerous instability,

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accompanied by a persecution complex."

"I don't think there is any way."

"If you could borrow the equipment from those people, I think I could probable handle it myself."

Paulsson shook his head decisevly. "If they have psycho conditioning equipment, it's illegal, and all we need right now is for that high class Hibernian politician to suspect us of trying to trap him into evidence of illegality."

"Well, all right. But be careful, flatter him a little, and try to work up some case where you can honestly side with him against one or two of the others."

He ducked through the hatch, while Paulsson turned to the opposite one, leading to Control. Outside it the twins were waiting. One of them said, "Sir, there was something else that came out there at Tara Hall, but we didn't want to mention it without your permission."

With a dreadful feeling that he knew what was coming, Paulsson said, "All right, you have permission to mention it to me. What was it?"

The twin said, "Just this, sir. You fell just as much in love with Deirdonnell as she did with you. I know we promised not to use ESP on members of the crew, but we couldn't help it, it came through so strong even when we tried to block it out."

"All right. Continue not to say anything to anyone else about it and go to your duties. All hands are going to be needed on that motor job."

As he climbed to Control, Captain Thorwald Paulsson was thinking of Desariza again. There just didn't seem to be any honest or honorable way out.

XI

THEY sat side by side on a foam-soft seat, looking out across the little stream that purled through the park west of Tara Hall. Whoever had laid it out had shown both taste and imagination in spite of being handicapped by the fact that most of the local bushes were cycads and the trees ginkgoales. The paths wound pleasantly among groups that created little private nooks among the trunks; there were beds of flowers from seed brought long ago from Mother Earth, their descendants now strangely altered by the Danaan soil and climate. Overhead, artfully placed soft lights among the upper branches shed spotted shadows that might have been those of an earthly moon, and here and there other couples wandered slowly or in low voices exchanged endearments.

Paulsson said, "Are you going on the trials?"

Deirdonnell's face was half-turned away from him. "No. I—" She stopped with a little catch in her voice.

"I've never handled a ship with a neptunium motor. It has a great deal more power than the type we came with."

"They say so." Her hand rested listlessly on the seat.

"What kind of flowers are those over there—the red ones?"

"I don't know."

It had been like that from the beginning of their conversation. Paulsson gathered himself a trifle, and said, "Deirdonnell, have I offended you somehow? I asked you to come out here on the last night before the trials because I take pleasure in your company, and I thought you came because you take some pleasure in mine. Now you'll hardly speak to me."

The girl put both hands to her face. Then she said, speaking through her fingers, "It's just unhappy that I am. I don't like being used by those I thought my friends, I don't."

"What do you mean? I—"

She was suddenly on her feet, facing him in a fury. "You don't know, is that the story? Well, I know. I know how you came here to steal away my father's motor, and when you couldn't get it honestly, you turned round and played friends and wanted to be a lover to the first girl you could find, so that she could help you go back and marry your black-haired wench. A fine friend you are! Take your dirty hands off me!"

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For a moment she struggled to break free of his encircling arms, then suddenly collapsed into sobs as holding one of her hands, he lowered her back to the seat. After a minute or two, as she became a little quieter, he said, "Deirdonnell," in a strangled voice.

Sob. "Deirdonnell, listen to me," he said again. "One thing I want you always to remember, no matter what happens. I love you, and I always will. There's no play about it. If you want me to prove it, I'll have the old motor put back in my ship and go away without anything but the memory of you and of our love."

The sobbing stopped. She looked around the corner of her shoulder at him, then swung to face him fully. "Is that true, now?"

"As true as death. I'm not sure who you've been talking to, although I think I know, but it doesn't matter. I love you, and I don't ever want to leave you. If you doubt me, come on the trials with me tomorrow."

"Ah," she said, and the next moment was in his arms, he holding her desperately and not for the moment caring or daring to think of the Service or his mission or anything but the desire to have her there. But as their lips drew apart, he whispered, "But you're going to marry the Boss of Lougheda."

"Ah, no," she said, then seizing him as urgently as he had gripped her. "Take me away tonight, now, in one of your helis. We'll go to the Kerrys of Kerrymore, and they'll never get us back."

Paulsson felt all hot and cold together. "And leave my crew? Deirdonnell, dearest, I love you, but these men trust me. I've got to see them through, somehow, get them back safely to Mother Earth."

She flashed at him suddenly, "Then it's true what I said that you came here to steal my father's motor."

He did not let her go. "It started out that way, yes, no matter what you think of me for saying it. But I did fall in love with you, I do love you. Can't we work something out?"

SHE kissed him, and shivered a little in his arms. After a minute, she said, "You'll not be thinking so much of me either, when I tell you that if you go on those trials tomorrow, you'll not be coming back, nor any of the others, either. Don't go!"

"Deirdonnell, what do you mean?"

She stirred in his arms, then half-pulled herself free. "Kiss me again, and tell me you won't be hating me for it—"

"Never." He did.

"—and I'll tell you the whole of it, even if it was my own plan, and I'm throwing down my own father. And you can hate me for that, too, if you want to. I don't care now. But this is the way it is. Some of the people my father knows on the Council back there, they knew he was near to making this motor and that we had all the neptunium in the world for it in Tara—"

"Would it be the group that call themselves the Reformers?"

"Yes. You know, then?"

"Not the whole story," said Paulsson. "I didn't know they were in touch with your father."

"Well, so they were. They were wanting the motor for themselves instead of for the Space Service that was always coming nosing around with their inspectors and so on. So my father says to them that he will make a deal; if they will let us work out the motor and use it on enough ships to get rid of the Kerrys and Loughedas and put Danaan under one government, they could have it."

"I see," said Paulsson. "And I suppose that's why you went semi-closed."

"That's it. And these Reformers put the bill through the Council, and as soon as it was through and we had no more inspectors left, we went to work on the motor. We've no more than three ships equipped with it yet, because it's very hard to build. But then, before we were ready, my father heard from his friends that you were coming here, and we were to take care of it—"

"Harperonik said we were expected, so I knew something was wrong?"

"Who?"

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"Harperonik. I'll tell you about him later. Go on."

The girl looked down. "We didn't know what to do, and so we waited to see what you'd be like when you got here, and then I—I—sort of fell for you, and I persuaded father that the best thing would be to have you on our side at least till we got rid of the Kerrys, and I enjoyed being with you, and. . . ."

Her voice trailed off. Paulsson said, "We're in too much trouble to hold out on each other."

"And then I found out about this girl back on Mother Earth." She began to shake a little, and he kissed her again.

"It was Arthur Gordon, the engineer, who told you, wasn't it? I thought so. All right, Deirdonnell, I'll tell you the story, perfectly straight. Her name is Desariza and her father is one of the backers of this expedition. She's very beautiful and quite a fine person. I've known her for a long time, and gone around with her a good deal when I was on Earth, and made love to her a little, and we had good times together. I think she expects me to ask her to marry me when I get back, and I think she'd say yes. There it is."

"So I'm just one in line." Her voice had a little edge to it.

"No. This is for good."

She gripped him again. "Don't let me go. I almost let them do it."

"Do what?"

"Oh—" She moved a little in his arms. Then, "I thought, when I found out about this other girl, that you were just—leading me on for what you could get out of it. So I told father it would be too dangerous to let you go with the neptunium motor, even just against the Kerrys. And Gordon said so, too. So we took the cadmium dampening rods out of the reactor on your ship and replaced them with indium."

FOR a moment there was a silence. Then Paulsson said, "I see. And when the high-speed rockets were turned on and the neptunium went in, there wouldn't be any absorption of electrons, and the whole motor would gradually build up into a huge atomic bomb, and then explode. Nice ideas you people have in Tara."

"It was me that had it. I thought that perhaps the weight and color would be so much alike that you wouldn't be able to tell the difference without a chemical analysis, and you wouldn't think of making one. Now do you hate me?"

"No, you devil." He kissed her again, hard. "Are the indium rods still there?"

"I—I'm sure they are. That's why you can't go on the trials tomorrow."

"Yes I can. We'll simply change them."

"You can't. You haven't any cadmium dampers, and the *Maev* is going to take off with you to see that you don't make any stops where you might change."

Paulsson said, "You certainly sewed things up tight," and once more there was a moment of silence. Then the girl stirred. "I don't care what you think of me," she said. "If I'm going to be for you, I'm going all the way. Look now—they know me on the *Maev*. Can't I get the cadmium rods from her reactor for you?"

"And when they find they're gone, I think they'd let us have it without asking questions. Remember, your father isn't slow, and he's got us bracketed from those projectors on the roof of the Hall. We wouldn't have time to make a take-off."

"All right." Her voice was low. "I'll put the indium rods into the *Maev's* reactor. They'll be getting no more than what they planned for you."

Paulsson experienced a slight sense of shock, along with the hope that he could live up to this. Before he could say anything, the girl added, "But you'll have to take me away with you." Then memory suddenly jagged back along the corridors of time to an evening on the terrace of the Arizin house, with Desariza, lovely in her evening dress, saying, "This trip is a good deal like Jason's search for the golden fleece . . . he got all tangled up with a witch."

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This was it, history repeating itself, or almost repeating itself, as it usually did, and this strange, tempestuous, passionate girl in his arms was the witch, Medea. And he loved her, helplessly.

Deirdonnell said, "We haven't too much time. We have to do *something.*"

Paulsson shook himself. "It won't work to have you doing it. You'd be seen and probably someone would get curious, and I don't think you could handle the rods anyway. They're too heavy. But I think there is an answer. Come on!"

He got up, pulling her to her feet after him. "I'll talk as we go. My heli's in the courtyard. Do you think you'll be noticed?"

"It won't matter. My father wanted me to—keep you amused so you wouldn't get too curious about things."

HE COULD not repress a chuckle at the thought that Tanaka and O'Connell had each thought of opposite facets of the same plan to throw the two of them together. Deirdonnell pressed her fingers against the identification panel of the armored gate, and as it slid silently back, he said, "How much work have you people done with supersonics?"

"Not much. The communications from Mother Earth said there was such a thing, but our scientists have been busy in other directions— hello, Sean," she greeted one of the guards. "Tell everyone I'm going out for a while with Captain Paulsson, but I'll be back soon."

She climbed into the heli as he held the door open for her, and a moment later they were soaring smoothly out of the well of light in the courtyard of Tara Hall. "Good-bye, Tara," she said, with a touch of sadness in her voice, then suddenly was efficient again. "Why do you want to know about supersonics?"

"Because if your people aren't up to the developments of the last four years, I think we're in the clear. It's more of an art than a science even yet, but we're lucky enough to have one of the best artists in the business aboard the *Argo.*"

Beneath them the tree-shrouded landscape of Danaan slipped past in the moonless night, as the beam-light glowed on the instrument board. To the pair in the heli who had so swiftly and strangely come together, it suddenly seemed there was nothing more to say; they sat silent with hand clasped in hand until the heli followed the *Argo's* beam down and rested on the landing ramp extruded from the big ship's side.

Paulsson's first question to the duty man was, "Where's Engineer Gordon?"

"He's gone over to the Tara ship, the *Maev,* sir. He left word that he wanted to run one trial aboard to see how they handled a neptunium reactor in flight."

Paulsson grunted. "I thought that would be about it. Very well, tell Peterfeld to have the duty gang pull all the damper rods in the neptunium reaction and load them aboard this heli—on the double. And get Paul Boone for me. Even if he's asleep, rouse him out. I want to see him in my cabin with his box. Tell him it's an emergency. This way."

He led Deirdonnell along the passage and down the handholds to the cabin, observing as the door slid back, "You aren't going to find it very comfortable aboard, and you may be spacesick. Some people get that way from the effect of seeing others walking across the walls and ceilings. Want to pull out?"

"And would you think me the sort of person to draw back now, after selling Tara out for you?"

They were still clinched when Paul Boone came in, his eyes looking sleepy. Paulsson sketched the story of the indium rods for him rapidly, then said, "Now we're going over to the *Maev* and make the change. We can get aboard all right, because Deirdonnel will be recognized as Boss O'Connell's daughter and assistant, and they haven't any reason yet to believe that I'm on to their game. But the minute I start tampering with dampening rods, there's going to be trouble. Now I know you can put the people of the *Maev* into a hypnotic sleep all right, because I've seen you do it before. But even that by itself isn't quite

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good enough. We're walking on eggs here, up against a gang who are suspicious with pretty good reason, and clever. If they discover they've been doped, there'll be an investigation even if they don't know how we did it, and we can't afford to be investigated. Now what I want to know is can you do something with that magic box of yours to leave them with the impression that everything's all right."

Boone frowned. "That's a hard one," he said. "You know the effect wouldn't be permanent?"

"If it lasts for three or four hours, it will be plenty. It will be dawn by then, and we take off at dawn. And shortly after that it won't matter what they think." He ended a trifle grimly.

"All right, I'll try," said Boone, seating himself on the edge of the desk, and swinging his black box around onto his knees. He opened the lid and bent over it, his hawklike profile wearing an air of intense absorption, and began fingering the keys.

Deirdonnell said suddenly, "That's wonderful. I never felt so good in my life, and I know everythings going to be all right now." But Boone shook his head, stopped, then slowly began picking out another combination, then stopped. "I think maybe that will do it," he said, looking up. "What I have in mind will depress the memory centers at the same time it sets up a sense of pleasure. The affected memories will come back in a set of flashes a few hours afterward, and I won't guarantee that I can cover everyone in their ship with it, if it's a big one. But we ought to get everyone in the engine spaces, which is the important part, and we ought to be out of the way before their other departments run a check. Here—" he zipped a pocket, took out a case and handed them some small objects. "—you'll need these for your ears, and when we get there you'll have to communicate by means of signs. I don't want to put you to sleep or knock out your memories."

The annunciator said, "Landing deck to Captain. Heli is loaded."

Paulsson snapped a switch. "Captain to landing deck. We will take off in five minutes. Loading of heli is not to be mentioned in public."

XII

AS THE *Argo's* tall snout swung slowly round, water churned to the boiling point under her sides. Paulsson applied brief rocket-blasts to gain sea-room and urge her into position for the take-off. Overhead, day had begun to break behind dark clouds, there was driving rain outside and a high sea that would keep the ship bouncing until she was fully airborne. In Control all hands were in their webbing hammocks, Deirdonnell beside Paulsson in the niche of one of the calculators, while Astroth handled the take-off.

"We'll know in a couple of minutes," he said.

Deirdonnell said, "I've known that lieutenant at the landing deck of the *Maev* all my life, and I'm sure he didn't even recognize me when we took off. Now he—" She stopped.

"He what?"

"He'll probably be blown to bits without even remembering why."

In the borrowed space working clothes she looked even more beautiful than in the formal evening dress she had worn when embarking on the adventure. Paulsson said, "Are you beginning to regret it?"

"No!" Her answer was fierce. "I won't let myself regret a thing."

"Well, anyway, if you stay with this ship, you'll earn the right to wear a second name," he said in an effort to change the subject. The *Argo's* hull vibrated as the low-power rockets took hold with a roar; she lifted her nose and was airborne as the pressure forced her occupants back into their hammocks. The plates showed a uniform greyness as she punched into the cloud layer, a greyness that became gradually brighter, then changed to brilliant sunlight, and they were plunging upward over a sea of rolling cloud.

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Deirdonnell said, "There was one thing I meant to ask Paul Boone—how his ear-plugs worked. I thought his supersonics affected the nerve-centers directly."

"They do," said Paulsson. "The plugs aren't really plugs; they contain elements that heterodyne some of the supersonic impulses."

"I'm interested. I believe I'll get him to show me how to operate his transmission box. I'm not too bad at music and that sort of thing."

"You learn it and you'll get a space rating as well as a new name. A good supersonics person is about as easy to find as a planet with a fifty per cent oxygen atmosphere."

"I thought you said they didn't take women in the service."

"I did, but you could go on a commercial run. They don't condition people for them, and they often use supersonics to keep the passengers contented." He reached out to a switch, "Observation from Captain: Any sign of our companion yet?"

"Captain from Observation: Negative."

"Have you a bearing on their station yet?"

"Negative. Must be on the other side of the planet."

"As soon as you get one, report it." Paulsson addressed Astroth, "Lieutenant, when that station's found, I think it would be a good idea to pass into a matching orbit with the planet between us and them. If what I'm expecting happens, there are going to be some pretty un-pleased people out there, and they'll at least have big guns, if not torpedoes aboard."

BELOW, Danaan had dwindled to a perceptible ball. "There she is, sir," said one of the crew members, pointing, and the saucer-like shape of the station swam into view at Danaan's rim, gleaming brightly. Astroth touched his switch. "Observation from Deck: Give calculators co-ordinates for a matched orbit on that station." He glanced at his instrument board. "We have orbital velocity now, sir. Shall I cut rockets?"

"Cut," said Paulsson, just as the annunciator said, "Communications to Captain. We have magneto-band signal that *Maev* is taking off now. Will rendezvous with you at right angle ten-seventeen, declension minus sixty-four zero eight relative on station."

Dr. Lowendijk from his post gave a little laugh. "When I was in training school I did better than that. They have not given you distance or relative speeds."

"Because they don't expect us to get there," said Paulsson. "They want to set up a matching course on us at a good safe distance. By the way, is this orbit all right for your superspeed?"

"Not the best, but it will do. I have it set up to go on automatically any time after you give the order."

Deirdonnell said, "Here she comes," and in the plates they saw the long torpedo-like shape of the *Maev,* with its delta wings rising through the cloud level below on a tail of flame.

"Captain from Communications: We are getting a signal from the planet."

"Accept on voice and pipe it in."

There was a momentary scratching from the annunciator, and then a voice they had not heard before said; "Strange winged ship from ground station Kerry: What is the purpose of your flight? We require declaration of intention."

Paulsson said, "Mother Earth ship *Argo* to ground station Kerry: Testing new equipment. No ulterior purpose."

"Be warned. We have you bracketed in with long-range rockets."

"We are warned," said Paulsson, drily, "Out." Astroth laughed. "Chemical heads, too, I'll bet. Where do they think we are—back in the twentieth century?"

Deirdonnell said, "The Kerrys have some very good chemists. They have better protective devices than we do, but I don't think they could do anything to a ship like this, and they don't have the neptunium motor."

On the screen the *Maev* was now visi-

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ble between them and the planet, still flashing along with a tongue of fire from her stern. She seemed to have flattened out her course into an orbit around the planet and was going past them, toward the station. Paulsson gazed at her and said to Deirdonnell, "Do you have a brother?"

"No. I'm an only child. Why?"

"That's a relief. Medea did."

"Who is Medea?"

Abruptly the control room carried the sound of a voice from the other ship, "*Maev* to *Argo:* Why are you not making speed toward appointed rendezvous?"

Deirdonnell gave a sudden gasp and clutched Paulsson through the webbing. "That's my father's voice!" she cried. "Make him go back!"

Paulsson said into the instrument, "*Argo* to *Maev:* Operational question; is Boss O'Connell aboard?"

"Where else would he be? This is Mike O'Connell, ordering you to speed up for rendezvous."

Paulsson gave a glance at the tense girl and said, "Request that you return to base and examine your high speed motor."

The *Maev* was gaining fast now, her tail plainly visible. The voice from her came crackling from the annunciator; "Be damned to you if I do. What kind of a silly fool do you take me for?"

The fire at her tail suddenly winked out, there were flashes from the steering rockets along her side. The annunciator said briefly, "Second ship coming up, sir."

The lower plate showed a great sphere, its face pitted with gun-emplacements, just poking through the cloud cover on the planet beneath. Deirdonnell's voice had a break in it, "Oh, they weren't going to give you a chance."

OUT ahead the *Maev* was around her turn. A flash of something yellow-brown appeared at her tail. "Going into high-speed rocket power," observed Astroth casually, snapped switches and as the *Argo* leaped to the application of her own power, said, "Course eighty-four degrees right, angle twenty-seven, we can duck them."

The *Maev* leaped in their direction, and then suddenly, something seemed to go wrong. There were little bright sparks in the dull color of her exhaust. They grew and spread and then, all at once, she was no longer a ship but the center of a huge expanding ball of flame, as bright as a minor sun.

"High speed!" shouted Paulsson. "All hands stand by for superspeed! Put on your automatics, Per."

The menacing ball of fire, now shot with strange colors, growing all the time, changed its position from ahead to beneath as the *Argo* shot upward under the thrust of her own high-speed rockets, powered beyond anything they had known by the neptunium motors. "We have escape velocity," Astroth reported calmly.

"Keep it! Make an orbit," said Paulsson. "Observation, what about that second ship?"

"Obscured by the cloud of the explosion," came back. "Last observed coming straight out from the planet, apparently on high-speed rockets."

"They'll have to duck around it," said Lowendijk. "If we can reach superspeed point, we'll be all right."

"Where's the station?" asked Paulsson.

"Bearing two-one-six, eighty-nine-zero-four, eleven-twenty-two relative. We're breaking away from it."

"Are they making any firing preparations?"

"None observed."

Paulsson said, "We're not out of the woods by a long shot, but I think we'll make it." He turned to Deirdonnell. "The only thing I can say is that I'm sorry. I guess you know that." The girl's face was white, but her voice was steady. "You don't need to be sorry for me unless you intend to give up on me. I'm no experienced spaceman, but I saw it all; he was trying to force you to use your high-speed rockets and he thought he knew what was going to happen, only

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it happened to him instead."

Lowendijk said, "What I don't understand is that if he had intentions against us why didn't he just let us have it from the projectors?"

"We talked about that," said Deirdonnell. "I wouldn't let him."

"Observation to Captain," said the annunciator. "Second ship is clear of the explosion cloud. Training guns."

The next minute the grey of superspeed enveloped them.

XIII

THE warning light flashed redly, defying Paulsson's glare. He said, "We'll have to come out. There's no two ways about it. The only thing I'd like to know is whether we've got pirates again or that ship from Danaan."

Deirdonnell said, "Doesn't the fact that those needles are vibrating in both planes mean that there are two tracer beams on you?"

"Probably. Why?"

"Then I think it's our—I mean, the Tarans. Father had two ships beside the *Maev*—the *Cliona* and *Columbha,* and they both have full deep space equipment."

"Spheres?"

"Yes."

"Then they have high speed spin-chambers. Plus neutronium motors. Which means that they're faster than we are in superspeed or out of it. And they know we're planning to stop at Aldea for air. Which means that they'll lay for us. I wouldn't give too much for our chances right now."

Deirdonnell said, "Couldn't you stop at some other point and notify the Space Service? Father was always afraid they'd find out he was building illegal warships."

Paulsson shook his head. "It's a nice idea, my dear, but not practical. It takes time to send a communication to the service, and more of it for the service to send a squadron. While we were waiting for the word to get through, they'd come out beside us, shoot us up and then say 'Oops, sorry' when the service boys came, or simply tell them any story they wanted to. We wouldn't be around to contradict it."

Lowendijk stroked his tuft of beard. "Nevertheless, this is part of a plan if not all of it. I begin to see why the late Mike O'Connell placed so much reliance on his daughter. There is one place where we can be sure of assistance."

"What do you mean?"

"Neu Bayern. They owe us a debt of gratitude, and being Germans will honorably repay it."

Paulsson said, "I see your point. But we don't know where we are in relative space now, and when we come out, we might have to make a long run on rockets to Neu Bayern, and they'd catch us."

The little mathematician's face took on an expression of foxiness. "No, my friend. The rabbit often escapes the fox by doing something the fox does not think of. We come out now, quickly; fix the position of Neu Bayern, which cannot be too far by the amount of relative time we have taken. Then go at once into superspeed for Neu Bayern. We should gain just enough time for you to make the surface of the planet, but that is your business."

Paulsson gazed at him. "It's ingenious, but what about calculating the course for Neu Bayern? Won't it take a couple of hours absolute?"

Lowendijk tapped himself on the chest. "I am Per Lowendijk and I am a mathematical genius, but I must have a first-class calculator beside me here, and the young lady will have to give her place to him. Moreover, the presence of females is disturbing when I wish to think."

Paulsson frowned, then turned quickly to the switch. "All hands, stand by for emergence," he said. "Observation, as soon as we emerge, I want absolute and relative bearings on our location and Neu Bayern to be taken at once and fed directly into the calculators." He swung to Deirdonnell, "Do you mind? I think you'd better take my cabin. You'll find a hammock webbing behind the three

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panel. As soon as you get into it, call me on the intercom."

SHE was already getting out of the webbing, undoing it with swift fingers. Astroth said, "Sir, shouldn't we load in case they make a rapid come-out on us and open fire?"

Paulsson shook his head. "No, we're a rabbit this time. I want all hands to operate the spin-room for a quick duck back in if they come out on us, and I'm going to keep it up until we get a good fix in Neu Bayern. By varying between superspeed and normal, we'll keep the initiative. I know it's taking a chance on hitting a solid body, but it can't be helped."

The intercom said, "All tucked in," in Deirdonnell's voice, Paulsson counted—"One—two—three—" and threw the switch. The plates were suddenly ablaze with stars. Lowendijk bent over his board with an expression of frowning concentration while the calculating machines clicked and the others in the control room held their breaths. Astroth reached out to touch Paulsson's arm and point to where, not 300,000 miles away, a methane planet was swinging, its pull already throwing them into the webbing as the *Argo* responded to its gravitational attraction. "We'll have to—" he said, but Lowendijk said, "Ssh," and Paulsson glanced at the mathematician, then shook his head.

The *Argo* tilted in response to the orders of the planet, turning floor into side-wall and side-wall to floor, and Astroth drew his breath in sharply. Everyone in the control room could see that unless something was done about it quickly they would be drawn into the poisonous atmosphere of the giant down there, but Paulsson merely watched Lowendijk intently, his hands on the switches.

Suddenly the mathematician began to punch keys, pausing to study the coordinates that emerged on his board. Without looking round, he said, "I haven't time to do it on automatic. Give me a six-second blast on the lower high-powers."

"Six seconds on the lower high-power rockets," said Paulsson into the intercom, and those in the control room jerked to the shock of the firing, as the *Argo* leaped forward on a course that would carry her dreadfully close to her unknown monstrous neighbor.

There was a flash of light from one of the plates, and a spaceman said, "Ship has emerged off the port lower quarter."

"Ssh," said Lowendijk again, and then, "Three seconds on left steering low power."

Paulsson repeated the order, and glanced at the plate that showed the emerging ship. It was one of the Danaan vessels all right, and as he watched, there was a puff of something behind her that indicated she was putting on rockets. Still too far away for a shot from the guns, but getting closer.

"Duty section two, relieve from spin-room and rig out torpedo intercepters on turret four," he said quietly.

The new course acquired by the ship under the influence of the rocket blasts had changed balances again. "Four seconds more on lower high-powers," said Lowendijk, and as Paulsson passed the order, the speak-box clicked and a voice came through, "Ship *Argo* you are ordered to maintain orbit until we close. This is Tara ship *Columbha*. You will receive a fair trial if you return the Boss's daughter."

They were right on top of the planet now, so close that the indicator on the instrument board was registering the presence of occasional molecules of ionized hydrogen. One of the watch said, "Ship has emerged off starboard upper bow."

"They've got us boxed," said Astroth, but Lowendijk said, "Spin-room ready, please. I am counting for application of superspeed. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six—"

"Forward ship firing!"

"—three, two, one—*go!*"

I THINK I'm getting it," said Deirdonnell. "Would you like to feel hungry, darling? I can evoke a response like

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that every time."

"You don't need supersonics for it, though," said Paulsson.

She laid aside Paul Boone's box and faced him across the table of the cabin. "This orbiting before landing is the dullest part," she said. "I didn't realize how long it took. Are either of them in the atmosphere yet?"

"One of them was just touching the upper edge when we passed it on the last orbit. But we have all the advantage of them now because of our wings. They'll have to maneuver in very slowly. I can't see what they hope to gain by following us to the ground with illegal ships. They must know they have no standing."

Deirdonnell smiled. "You don't know my countrymen. They can be very persuasive. By time we get around they will probably be in the Service, and you'll be just a space pirate they're after."

"That wouldn't work. Manteuffelier, the Chancellor here, knows better."

The girl said, "I can't pretend to anticipate what line they'll take. But I do know, indeed, that Ian Macartney—he's captain of the *Cliona*—is as clever a man as ever I knew, and many a time I've worked out plans with him for this and that. And if it was me, now, on those ships, I'd do something like this: I'd come in and turn them over to the authorities just because they were illegal, saying that it was only because of Mike O'Connell that I hadn't done it before. Then I'd charge you, Thorwald Paulsson with kidnapping. You might get the best of the charge, seeing that I, me, Deirdonnell, came of my own free will, but while you were doing that, the *Cliona* and *Columbha*, would be off to Mother Earth in the hands of the Reformers, and then where would you get any credit for bringing back the neptunium motor?"

"I'm glad I have a brain like yours on my side instead of against me, anyway," said Paulsson. "That's just the kind of a legalistic argument that would appeal to Germans. Now think of the answer to it."

"That's not easy, for it will be as bad if we agree to wait here till someone from the Service comes, and besides you must be back in a hurry. Couldn't you wait till they are aground and then quick, take off again? That should give you the start on them."

"Not enough of a start. We'll have to stop at Aldea to take on air, and they'd either catch us in space, or beat us to the Council with some such story as the one you just cooked up. No, it has to be something that will keep them out of business until we can get back. Damn it! If it were a military problem, I could work something out, but these political jigglings make my head ache."

"Let it not ache," said Deirdonnell. "It's just that you have to meet the situation as it comes, like that little man there who calculated out your course, though I will say I don't like his opinion of women."

"Dr. Lowendijk? He's really as much of a genius as he thinks he is. He—"

The intercom said, "Control to Captain: We are in landing orbit."

He got up and kissed her. "Want to come up to Control or hammock in here?"

"I'll go with you. It was horrible, being alone in here and knowing things were dangerous, and not being able to do a thing or even see you."

IN THE control room the plates showed them just crossing the borderline from the day to the night side of the planet, its flat terrain and lush vegetation ribboned with rivers. High overhead Neu Bayern's space station was visible; long in the distance the sun was reflected redly from a round shape that would be one of the pursuing Tara ships, orbiting in under gravitation, its skin heating in the process. It was briefly dotted with flame as it fired a braking blast. Lieutenant Astroth measured it with his eye. "My guess is we give them another five hours to get down," he said.

Paulsson glanced over the instruments and took the controls. Far ahead on the ground horizon, there was a swelling point of light that marked the space station. He eased the ship a little leftward,

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touched the intercom switch and said, "Communications, get the station down there and tell them I want an urgent private interview with Chancellor Manteuffelier. Emergency. Better make it formal, because they're Germans, and it's late enough so he's probably in bed."

He touched the forward rockets into life for a moment, and Lowendijk said, "I have a genial plan. Let us make communications with that Tara ship and send them the co-ordinates of the course I worked out to get here, then ask them why it took them so long."

Without turning his head, Paulsson said, "Decision: no. We don't want to have anything to do with them. We all know we owe our lives to you, Per. Don't rub it in."

"Ah, it is nothing without quick observations from that great fool of a Mannstein. An astronomer is like a woman; he does not need a brain, only reflexes." He glanced at Deirdonnell, who ran her tongue out at him.

The *Argo* slid down the long slope of air and ground to a halt on the sandy strip. Paulsson touched the switch, "All hands. We are aground, but as this is an emergency landing, there will be no ground leaves. I want all hands at duty stations in the turrets. Dr. Tanaka will accompany me." He turned round. "So will you, Deirdonnell. You're my dirty trick department."

Lowendijk said, "All tricks are dirty. That is the definition," and they went to the airlock.

The man who met them at the foot of the landing ramp was not Bartgenstein the greeter, but a cheerful individual who announced his name as Schulwedel. "Chancellor Manteuffelier has your message," he said, as he led the way to the car. "For anyone else the answer would be to proceed regularly, but he is very grateful to you."

"Glad to be of help," said Paulsson, extending a hand to help Deirdonnell in. "You have things worked out with the alveoli, then?"

Schulwedel started the machine and waved a hand toward the edge of the port, where some of the banana-like trees had been cleared and the port lighting showed a tiny green fuzz just showing above level ground. "See for yourself. That is barley. We have wheat growing, too, and other grains. The alveoli keep them clear."

The car dipped and rose across the uneven track. Ahead, behind the trees, the building came into view, looking more solid, most of its walls let down for the night. Off at one side of the road, a couple of alveoli looked up from digging and piped amiably.

Schulwedel said, "This way," and led them into the building, down a dimly lighted passage, around a corner, and they were in a comfortable big room with a view out into the trees and Manteuffelier sitting in it. He rose as they entered and came forward, holding out his hand. "Captain, what a pleasure to see you again. I had not the hope. Assuredly you will have drinks." He clapped his hands for an alveole, ordered the drinks, and there were introductions. Manteuffelier seated himself again. "Now, Captain, it is hoped I can repay your kindness to Neu Bayern. You have opened a new life for us, and we can now emerge from colonial status. What is your emergency, and why are you pursued by cruisers of the Service?"

"They're not from the service," said Paulsson, "and it's a long story. Thanks." He sipped, and, "I'll tell you the whole thing. I think our position is justified, but there may be a legal argument on the other side."

WITH help from Deirdonnell he gave a narration of the events on Tara, the pursuit and the probable action of the *Cliona* and *Columbha*. When he had finished, Manteuffelier said, "So. I see. And if you are right, your two friends will appeal to the law here. Yes. And you wish them detained but yourself released. Yes. This is not easy. I would do so without question, but if there is a legal appeal, it will be to my Council, and in that I have only one vote. Yes. And they have taken no violent action

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on Neu Bayern or in its neighborhood."

He drummed abstractedly on the arm-rest with his fingers. Deirdonnell said, "I have a plan, I think. From what Thorwald said, you personally do the negotiating with the alveoli, don't you?"

"That is correct."

"And they have a king?"

"Yes. The little Glucki."

"Do they obey him?"

"How could it be else? They are very primitive. The king is regarded with religious veneration."

"Now, then;" said Deirdonnell, "suppose this happens. Suppose the *Cliona* and *Columbha* land here, and the alveoli come to see them, and just after they landed, all the electrical apparatus on the two ships went out of order. Wouldn't that be too bad now?"

Paulsson looked at her with admiration, and a smile like a sunrise spread across Manteuffelier's face. He slapped the arm-rest. "Excellent! They could not take off; they could not even live aboard. The apparatus is on atomics, but it all requires electrical impulses for starting, is it not so, Captain?"

"That's right," said Paulsson, "but I see a difficulty. It won't give us enough time. Your alveoli can doubtless put the electrical equipment on those ships out of action for a while, but they can't stay around indefinitely, and as soon as they leave, the ships will take off again. And we'll have to stop at Aldea between here and Mother Earth to take in air."

"Aldea you cannot stop at," said Manteuffelier. "The latest communication from the Council of Worlds says there is a local war there, and the planet is closed until notice. But your difficulty is no difficulty, my friend. When the alveoli join their hands, their electrical organs fall into series and they can emit discharges of great power. This is how they defend themselves against predators. Therefore, with enough of them, we can not merely temporarily disable these two ships, but burn out their electrical equipment completely. Naturally, we will be most sympathetic and offer to repair the damage, but we have only one industrial area on Neu Bayern and not many electricians, and it will be very surprising if the entire electrical installation of ships as large as that can be restored rapidly." He laid one finger beside his nose. "It may even take as much as a year."

Paulsson looked at Deirdonnell. "And I thought you were a specialist in dirty tricks," he said. "Well, I suppose we ought to clear that spaceport and cruise in your lower atmosphere until we're sure those two are crippled." He stood up. "I suppose we don't need to tell you how grateful we are. You're really doing something for the whole Council of Worlds as well as for us."

"It is nothing," said Manteuffelier. "And besides, it is always a pleasure to do things for lovers." He clapped his hands. "Kaslein! Find King Glucki and ask him if he will be so good to visit the Lord Chancellor on a business of utmost importance."

XIV

FAR ahead and down, a ball of white radiance lifted on the horizon and grew rapidly larger. The tracer indicator glowed and vibrated.

"Damn it!" said Paulsson. "Why can't they get on with it? We'll be over that port again in another ten minutes, and I don't want to be caught in whatever kind of an electrical storm those alveoli set up."

"That is because you are too polite," said Lowendijk. "Turn your back and go the other way."

Paulsson punched a finger at the tracer indicator. "See that? The other one didn't really begin to come in for the port until we swung round as though we were making an exploration flight, and turned back in this direction. You don't think they're keeping one off the ground as a security measure, do you?"

"If they were," said Deirdonnell, "we'd have had some word from them. You notice they haven't tried to communicate with us at all? I don't know exactly what it means, but it does mean

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at least that they intend to play it perfectly legal, and not give us a chance to say anything until they get their story in.'"

There was a silence with tension in it in the control room as Astroth eased her up a trifle, and the illuminated area of the spaceport took shape as something composed of separate objects, with the lighting just beginning to pale before the coming dawn. A spot on the side of one of the enormous spheres down there could be nothing else but a landing ramp opening. Astroth switched for a higher magnification on the plates, and Lowendijk said, "Why—" when it happened.

A sudden surge of lightnings brighter than the lamps ran round and round and into the two spheres; the speak-box cracked with static, the lights below flared brilliantly, turned red and one by one died.

Lowendijk fell on Deirdonnell's neck in an embrace. Paulsson said, "For a man who doesn't want women to interfere with his thinking, you do pretty well. All right, take her up and put her into an orbit outside the station." He touched a switch. "Mannstein to Control with the catalog. And Communication, send this via the station: *Argo* to Chancellor Manteuffelier; we regret apparent damage to your port by accident at time of our departure. Best of luck and farewell."

The astronomer climbed through the hatch as the ship gathered acceleration, bookish and precise, greeted all hands and said, "If you say Aldea is closed, Captain, there is only one place, really, where we can make the stop for air. That is, unfortunately, Santa Eulalia."

He held out the catalog. Lowendijk looked at the page. "Why not Languedoc?"

"From here to Languedoc, yes. From Languedoc to Earth, we fall just fifteen minutes short of air. Here is the calculation. It is not insupportable, we could generate enough oxygen to carry us into an atmosphere, but it would require that you calculate a course that would not put us farther from the earth than the orbit of the moon. Would you care to guarantee it, genius?"

Lowendijk laughed. "There are not enough inhabited planets," he said. "Captain, when you become head of the service, you will see to it that more colonial expeditions are sent out. In the meanwhile, I am not that much of a genius to set a course for the orbit of the moon when it is bad enough even to reach a solar system. Therefore, we will go to Santa Eulalia."

"What's the matter with Santa Eulalia?" asked Deirdonnell.

"We have reason to believe that the authorities there are playing ball with some of the same group that got in touch with your father," said Paulsson. "And the climate may not be too healthy."

"What kind of a colony is it?"

Mannstein, looking at the catalog, said, "Caribbean; the various islands and Central American countries, no one state. It's an exception to the general policy of unit colonization, I don't know why."

Deirdonnell said, "Then if what it said on my study tapes was true, you'll find as many people there for you as against you. I'm thinking the Caribbeans are not so much different from us Irish in always wanting to be against the government."

"Looks like a case for our espers," said Paulsson. "I think that if we go aground there, you had better take them with you, Deirdonnell. They'll give you the information and you can call the play—as head of our dirty trick department. All right, Per, I guess it's a calculation for Santa Eulalia."

AS A well-organized and settled planet, Santa Eulalia had three satellite stations, which coached the *Argo* in smoothly across vitsas of towering mountains and long winding streams. The polar caps were small and there didn't seem to be very extensive ocean areas, but here and there the rivers spread out into long chains of lakes, shimmering brilliantly in the sun. It was beside one of these that the *Argo* came to rest, at the edge of the twilight zone. The opened

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airlock showed a cloudless sky, calm water rimmed with trees and fields beyond, and something that looked like a palace afloat on the farther shore, with gingerbread but not unpleasing architecture, whose prevailing feature was twisted white columns. Nearer, among the trees, a more severe building in painted stucco had gear on its roof to mark it as the ground office of the spaceport.

A dapper young man in a neat uniform, whose dark face showed traces of Latin ancestry waited bowing at the foot of the landing ramp. "Undurraga, reception officer," he said. "Santa Eulalia urges you to make use of all its facilities for as long as you wish to stay." He waved a hand at the stucco building. "Our halls of reception are there for your convenience, and if you wish higher diversion, there is our casino." He indicated the floating palace. "Air or ground cars or boats will be placed at your service as you desire."

"Thanks," said Paulsson, "but we are in a bit of a hurry, and only want to discharge some of our surplus water and take in some air. Although we could use a little high-protein food if you have some readily available. I am Captain Thorwald Paulsson of the prospecting ship *Argo*."

Undurraga flashed a set of dazzling teeth. "Who has not heard of Captain Paulsson? We are honored by your visit. I myself will wait upon your supply officer and determine the quantity of protein you need. While you wait, I trust you are in not too much haste to call on our local interventor, Alvaro Gomez? He was formerly of the commercial service, and it will give him great joy to see you."

Paulsson looked around. Deirdonnell, followed by Harperonik and Halperonik was just coming down the stairs, looking with pleasure on this smiling land, and Astroth, whose turn for ground leave it was, was just coming through the door of the air-lock. It wouldn't take long. He said, "I'd be glad to see your interventor for a few moments."

"Manuelcito!" A tall man with a lugubrious moustache detached himself from a little group around a ground car and came over. "You will take Captain Paulsson and his party to the Interventor Gomez." Undurraga flashed his teeth again. "All good wishes."

The car was open-windowed and as pleasantly arranged as the landscape. The little party climbed in as Undurraga went up the landing ramp into the ship, and it moved off noiselessly toward the ground office, past beds where flowering shrubs competed with neat lawn. Deirdonnell said, "They do themselves pretty well here, don't they?"

"You'd expect them to," said Paulsson. "In accordance with Huntington's law, coming from an unfavorable climate to a highly favorable one, there would be a release of racial and individual energy."

The girl said, her voice suddenly tight, "And will I be going to a favorable climate? Ah, Thorwald, don't ever be trying to leave me, will you, like that one you left back on Mother Earth? For if you do, I'll eat your heart out, I tell you plainly."

As he reached to take her hand and reassure her, with the thought of Medea in his mind, Harperonik leaned forward and whispered, "We almost had it, but you broke the connection with emotion."

"Had what?" Paulsson whispered back, keeping his eyes toward the front of the vehicle.

"The driver—he wants to tell you something, but doesn't dare."

"Keep after it."

THE vehicle swung round a curve and stopped with a flourish before a door whose multicolored plastic had been wrought into an intricate design. Manuelcito swung round, "When you wish to return tell the man at the door of the Interventor's office and he will call me."

Deirdonnell said, "It's such a lovely evening, and I'm sure Interventor Gomez doesn't want to see me. I'd like to ride around a little and see something of this place, if it's permissible." She turned and smiled a dazzling smile at the twins. "You can come along, if you like."

"Certainly, madame," said Manuel-

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cito. "To us of Santa Eulalia it is our highest pleasure to give pleasure to those who visit us." He almost bowed in his seat.

"Bright girl," said Paulsson, as though apropos of nothing, getting out. "You better come with me, Lieutenant."

She gave him a parting wave, and accompanied by Astroth, he strode into the building. There was a wide lobby with seats and a fountain in the center; to the left a row of offices, the names on the doors indicating that most of them dealt in exporting the products of Santa Eulalia, and beyond them shops where luxury articles were on sale. The right side was mostly occupied by recreation rooms, but the nearest large door had no name

on it, and there were two guards with side-arms in front. One of them stepped forward as the visitors swept the place with their eyes. "Captain Paulsson?" he said.

"And Lieutenant Astroth."

"The Interventor Gomez is awaiting you, but I have no instruction for the Lieutenant. One moment." He produced a small round device from his pocket and pressed it. "Did you have a pleasant trip, Captain?"

"Well—" Paulsson permitted himself a tight smile—"you could call it an effective one."

A gorgeously arrayed individual came out of one of the recreation rooms toward them. The guard indicated Astroth. "This is Lieutenant Astroth of the winged ship that has just landed. He is to be given every recreational facility for as long as he remains on Santa Eulalia. By order of the Interventor. Lieutenant, this is Guide Mordellopescar; you are to be denied nothing you desire."

Before Paulsson protested that he had no intention of staying long enough to allow Astroth any particular recreation, the other guard had the door open and he was being guided into an elevator as big as a small sitting room. The door closed. "You take pretty good care of your Interventor," he remarked.

"He is the father and mother of the people," said the guard. "One day he will be president of all Santa Eulalia. This way."

They were in a hallway with another guard, who manipulated controls to slide back a door at the other side. Inside was about what Paulsson expected; a big room, luxuriously furnished, with a handsome man behind a desk surrounded with visiplates at the opposite side. He rose as Paulsson entered. "Captain! What a pleasure! I should have known you from your reproductions. Come, sit by me."

A SEAT slid forward beside him, and as Paulsson lowered himself into it, the Interventor began to talk at once about the battle off the Horsehead nebula, as though it were something he had been waiting years to learn about. His questions were keen and so were his observations, and he seemed to know a good deal more about space tactics than one would have expected from a man whose service had been commercial. Paulsson found it almost impossible not to like the man, but as the conversation went on with no sign of flagging, something began to pick at the Captain's mind. Difficult though it was to think of anything else through the constant flow of conversation, he finally decided that it was the fact that Gomez had not said one word about the *Argo* and her voyage, which as one of the high officials of Santa Eulalia, should have been the thing that interested him most. But before he could say anything on the subject or even formulate his idea, there was a buzz at the Interventor's desk.

Gomez touched the listening device at

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his throat, cocked his head a little to one side, and said, "Your Lieutenant. He has received an invitation from some of our citizens for you and himself to attend one of our native dances at the casino. I should recommend it."

"I'd like to," said Paulsson, "but I'm anxious to get away without using up any more absolute time than I have to, and I'm really only waiting for some high-protein which was promised us. Besides, there's my—the lady who accompanied me here. If there's time I'd like to have her go with me."

"Who promised you the high-protein? Undurraga? Ah, there is a one. One moment." He lifted a speaker and said something to it in the usual low tone. After a minute there was another buzz, and he said something else, then turned to Paulsson:

"The high proteins will be aboard your ship before dawn, which will give you a matter of hours. Your lady has gone for a night drive and has not yet returned. Her driver reports that she is very interested in our lake country, but will come back to meet you either at the ship or the casino." He stood up, "Ah, Captain, it has been so exquisite a pleasure! And now you will have plenty of time to see our native dances, a memory you are sure to carry with you all your life."

The door from the outer hall slid back as though it had divined Paulsson's coming departure with a mentality of its own, and the guard stood waiting. In the elevator, Paulsson had the distinct impression that within this framework of smooth friendliness things were somehow being manipulated, and wished that the two espers, or even Dr. Tanaka had been present at the interview, but the message relayed from Deirdonnell undoubtedly meant that she was making good use of them.

As he reached the lobby, Astroth got up from one of the seats by the fountain and came over, accompanied by a black-haired girl with brilliant eyes, dressed in a style that left no doubt whatever she was a mammal. "Hello, Captain," he said. "This is Dolorilles. She has permission to take us to the casino for one of the spring dances."

"Do you need permission?" said Paulsson. "I should think it would be their business to attract an audience?"

Dolorilles fluttered long lashes at him. (Astroth would pick that type.) "Our spring dance is very special and rather stimulating," she said. "It is limited to persons of a certain emotional balance. But you would not be a captain unless you had such a balance, would you?"

"I think I'm protected," he said, and the girl led the way out, across the plaza and down a path under lighted trees to a dock where two or three gracefully-shaped boats were waiting.

DOLORILLES handled the controls herself, finding time to answer Astroth's comments on the beauty of the lake and the night. The casino proved even more elaborate than spaceport reception building, with a broad semi-circular plaza, holding little jetties for boats and tables where couples were talking and drinking in soft light that flowed from the table-tops themselves, while music of the characteristic Latin beat flowed from some invisible source—a scene of luxury and comfort that made the little park on Danaan cheap. Paulsson wondered what Deirdonnell would think of it when she arrived, and followed the others through the tables to a wide hall with the inevitable gambling room at one side, where a grave-faced attendant in a bright purple jacket greeted them.

"My friends have come all the way from Mother Earth to see a spring dance," said Dolorilles.

"You have an authorization?"

She reached to her belt and flashed something at him. His eyes widened. "This way," he said, and led them down the hall and along a passage to where he slid back the door on a room where all one wall was banked with flowers. The center was some kind of shiny plastic; the opposite side was occupied by deep soft couches with drink-boxes at

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each end. The attendant said, "I will get Herculadia for you, but it will be a few minutes before she is ready. We would consider it our highest pleasure if you enjoyed yourself in the meanwhile." He bowed again and was gone. Dolorilles said, "Let me dial you one of our Santa Eulalia drinks. It is made from a fruit that grows only near the equator and is called porenque."

She dialed, lifted the lid, and handed each of them a glass of cool, white liquid. Paulsson sipped his. It had authority. He said, "Does everyone on Santa Eulalia live as easily and pleasantly as you do here?"

"Pleasure is taking pleasure in what you have," said Dolorilles, sitting down close beside Astroth. "For the moment I have your lieutenant, and I am trying to persuade him to stay here forever."

He promptly put his arm around her, and it was obvious to Paulsson that he was not going to be part of this conversation, so he leaned back into the couch and considered the problem of why Santa Eulalia should wish to make common cause with the Reformers. There was certainly authoritarianism in this place, as witness Interventor Gomez and the guards with which he was surrounded. But it was a Latin authoritarianism that had learned to live with itself, and . . . .

The lights went out.

There was just time to draw one breath before a slow, throbbing music began to beat from everywhere at once, as though it came from the inside of the head. At the same moment light came again, subdued and hesitating, from half a dozen sources at once, and there was a girl in the center of the room, swaying to the movement of the music. She was barefooted and had very little on, that little diaphanous, but what chiefly held the attention was the fact that though her skin was of the typical Caribbean darkness, the hair that flowed past her shoulders was brilliantly blonde. She was in the most perfect unison with the deep, sensuous beat of the music; it was part of her, and she of it in the dim lights that pulsed and changed. And it was an unashamed dance of the senses, of invitation and pleasure. In spite of himself, in spite of the brief, flashing memory of what Deirdonnell had said in the ground car, Paulsson felt himself attracted, desiring this woman, drawn to the arms that extended toward him and the lips that smiled in invitation.

From somewhere in her draperies the dancer produced a huge jewel which glittered as it hung suspended from her fingers, and at the same moment all the lights but one bright beam disappeared, and she was visible only in the light refracted through the heart of the flaming gem. Swaying beneath it, but holding it unmoved, the dancer began to sing, in a dim, throaty voice, almost without words, a song that though it held not less passion than her dance was an invitation to rest yet a little while before the desired consummation. The beat of the music grew slower, and the dancer's movements. Paulsson could not tear his eyes from the jewel; it seemed to fill the whole world. He felt himself drifting off into a region of unimaginable pleasure and rest. . . .

XV

HE WAS violently sick. As he turned his retching, aching head, the first thing he saw was Deirdonnell, with Paul Boone's supersonic box strapped to her side and a tall man with an anxious face beside her. He sat up, and the motion brought him into contact with the dancer, Herculadia, on the couch beside him, her hands and ankles tied with pieces from her draperies.

Dierdonnell grabbed his hand. "Hurry!" she said. "I don't think they'll try violence, but you never know, and anyway, we've got to get Manuelcito out of here."

Astroth was behind them, looking both a little dazed and shamefaced. Paulsson said, "Is it day yet? I can't go till then, and then I have to go to Cintra with someone."

The girl stamped her foot. "You're going with me and now, or I'll have the

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left leg off you. Astroth, Manuelcito, get him on his feet."

This was Deirdonnell all right, but she was someone out of his past, and there was some absolutely compelling reason why he must not go with her. That was it—Herculadia!

"Why have you got her tied up?" he asked. "I remember now. I've got to take her to Cintra to be received by the President."

The two men took him by the arms and pulled him to his feet. "This way," said Manuelcito, steering him toward the back of the room, where behind some of the flowers another door-panel slid back. As the procession passed the other couch, Paulsson caught sight of someone who must be Dolorilles on it, also bound and with something across her face. He said, "Lieutenant Astroth, you can't do this to me! Let me go. That's an order." His own muscles were weaker than a kitten's.

"This way," said Manuelcito again, and they were hustling Paulsson down a dimly-lighted passage that ended in a kind of hall where a waiter hurrying past with dishes surveyed them with incurious eyes, and then they were out through a door onto a jetty where one of the little boats waited. There was something monstrous about this, something that must not happen. Paulsson said, "Deirdonnell, listen to me—"

"I will not. Get in now, and behave yourself, or I'll make you sick again."

Unwillingly, he got in. Manuelcito seated himself at the controls. The boat backed around in a circle and set off with spray flowing behind toward the casino, from which a faint pulse of music followed. In the distance, the lights around the spaceport building had gone out, and their pilot seemed to be guiding them by some sixth sense, but he presently swung them round, cut the gun, and they were in another jetty, with the tall shape of the *Argo* looming against the stars in the background. As they stepped out, a voice cried, "Who is it?"

The girl answered, "Deirdonnell, with Captain Paulsson and Lieutenant Astroth." A light-beam was flashed on their faces, and the next minute two armed members of the crew were beside them, guiding them up the ramp. Paulsson felt a sense of unbearable injury and loss as he stumbled up in the grip of his captors. They were taking him away from Herculadia, and she was the dearest, most desirable thing he had ever known. Two big tears came out on his cheeks. "Let me go!" he cried. "I must go back to her!"

Deirdonnell said, "Take him to the cabin. Will somebody call Dr. Tanaka?"

Lowendijk's face floated along the passage, set in a frown of anxiety. "Do you think—" he began.

"I think we must take off before they find he's missing," said Deirdonnell. "If it was back at Tara now, they'd be having the gardai out after us already. Can you—"

The rest was lost as he was pulled down the passage, gripping feebly for the hand-holds. One of the crewmen said, Take it easy, Captain," and the door of the cabin opened.

THE annunciator said, Stand by for take-off. Two minutes." Along with the hurt at leaving Herculadia behind it registered dimly in Paulsson's mind that there must be an emergency of some kind if there were going to be a short-period take-off, and if there were an emergency he belonged in Control, but he allowed himself to be hammocked in, with his two guards beside him. The annunciator began counting "—three—two—one—*go!*" and the ship trembled to the sound of the low-powers as he was hurled back by the familiar acceleration pressure. There was some reason why he ought not to be here at all; a sense of desperation gripped him as he struggled against the bonds of the hammock.

The repeater plate showed the land dropping darkly away beneath them, and then the cabin was filled with momentary light as the *Argo* rushed up into the glare of Santa Eulalia's sun; a light that dimmed as the modulators cut in, but not before the brief flare-up had

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etched objects with sufficient clarity to show Paulsson that the crewmen with him were Halperonik and Harperonik.

"Are you two trying to spy on me?" he demanded.

They exchanged glances across him. "N—no, sir," one of them said. "That is. . . ."

"Well, if you are I want it stopped at once." He was feeling a little better now, though still weak and giddy, like a cadet the first time in superspeed, and a determination was forming in his mind —to take over in Control as soon as the acceleration cut off and put an end to this idiotic escape act.

Instead of cutting out there was a low growl and the *Argo* went into high-speed rocket flight, propelled by the terrific power of the neptunium motor to an acceleration that drove him back into the webbing. They were kidnapping him; he didn't blame Deirdonnell, she naturally would want to keep him, but she just didn't understand how important it was to get back there to Herculadia and keep the appointment to see the President of Santa Eulalia. After that—

His thoughts drifted off into a region of grayness, and he did not know how long it was before the high-power rockets clicked off, and he was free. A glance at the repeater plates showed Santa Eulalia's sun small in the distance, while off to one side floated a methane planet. Paulsson stretched cramped muscles and began purposefully to release himself from the webbing. "If either of you two young idiots tries to stop me," he said, "I'll do more than just discipline you—I'll knock your heads together."

The door opened and Dr. Tanaka came in, followed by Bob Peterfeld, second engineer and the biggest man in the ship. The psychologist's face was grave, and he did not address the Captain, but the two espers. "What did you find?" he asked.

Harperonik said, "Hardly anything. It was all mixed up as though he couldn't get things straight, except once when he was thinking he ought to be in the Control room."

"What's this?" said Paulsson. "If you think—"

"Grab him, Bob," said Tanaka, unemotionally. "That's it. Hold his head back a little, you two. Now Captain Paulsson, if you'll just look at this metal mirror for a minute, you're going to sle-e-e-p. . . ."

ROCKETS had been cut; the plate showed the ruddy bulk of Mars, with his tiny twin moons dancing around him like motes, and they were speeding for home. Deirdonnell drew herself closer into Paulsson's arms and said, "Ah, darlin', I know it wasn't your fault at all, but when I saw you lying there in her arms, I thought it would be the end of me."

Paulsson kissed her and said, "It was very nearly the end of me, and I'm sorrier than I can be that it happened. I need a keeper."

"That's what you have and from now on. I should have killed her, and I'll kill anyone else that tries to take you away from me."

She clutched him fiercely and he thought of Medea again. He said, "They won't. Do you realize that what with going into superspeed and out of it again, this is the first chance I've had to ask you about the whole thing since Dr. Tanaka brought me to? I want the whole story."

She said, "It was Manuelcito. He belongs to a party they call the Aranjos on Santa Eulalia. I suppose they're no better than the others, but they're an underground movement and want no part of the government there. He was afraid to speak out until Harperonik told him what he was thinking about, but after that we all three went to work on him and he opened up."

"Then it was all planned?"

"It was that." They expected you to stop there for air on the way out and were going to trap you then, but somehow you must have gone to the wrong place."

Paulsson said, "We stopped at Aldea instead. I suppose it never occurred to

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them that we might know Santa Eulalia was on the other side."

"I don't know how much they knew. Anyway and all, they expected you to stop there, out or back, and had their plan all ready. They expected you to come aground with Lieutenant Astroth, and it was arranged for. Interventor Gomez to keep you talking until he found a woman, and then let him persuade you to go to that place, all natural as could be. I don't understand though, darlin', how you let yourself be hypnotized."

"The thing was pretty carefully rigged. I think there may have been something in the drink Astroth's girl mixed for me. But in any case the jewel that dancer had and the way she used it was enough to hypnotize almost anyone. You couldn't take your eyes off it once the music started. Did Manuelcito know about that?"

The girl stirred. "He said the dancer was going to hypnotize you. They often do it on Santa Eulalia, and some of them take it up willingly. Then he said they were going to plant a post-hypnotic suggestion that you should go away somewhere together in the morning."

"I wonder how long they expected to keep me."

"Forever. If the suggestion wore off, they would take you to another of those dances and put you under again. They do that on Santa Eulalia, too, especially with political opponents who are too important to dispose of in any other way. That's why Manuelcito was scared."

"So you broke it up. Why didn't you send Paul Boone? He could have broken it up—I think."

"Ah, I didn't dare trust anyone but myself. So I told Per Lowendijk about it and had him get the ship ready for a quick takeoff before they started shooting. That's what we'd do in Tara. But I couldn't work the supersonics any better than to make you sick. I'm that sorry for it, but you deserved it."

"I did, all right . . . Deirdonnell."

"What is it?"

"We aren't out of the woods. The people we're up against are playing for control of the whole galaxy, and they're nasty and plenty clever. They're not going to give up easily. I'm a dangerous person to be with."

"I'll take that chance," said she, and there was no more conversation for a while.

XVI

THE plastic strip said it was Mr. Nedraviston, and the numbers on it said he was a general reporter for media. Paulsson sighed, signified his acceptance of one more interview, and touched open the cabinet that held the drink-box. With things going as they were, he couldn't afford to antagonize any of the organs of public opinion. That the opposition didn't like him talking to them was not much help.

The door-panel clicked open to reveal Nedraviston as a tall man with a grave, thin face, dressed so elegantly that he might have been some kind of super social events reporter. He accepted a seat, waved aside the proffered drink with, "I seldom imbibe while on duty" and produced a pocket recorder.

Paulsson said, "If you're going to take down everything as said, I hope you'll give me a chance to revise the record. I'm in a rather delicate position just now."

"Naturally, Captain Paulsson." The reporter's smile was generous. "The media I represent—"

"What are they?"

"Oh, various ones." He waved a hand. "They deal mainly in the printed word for rather a thoughtful people in North America and among the North American colonial planets. An extensive operation. Now, Captain Paulsson, we understand that just after the *Argo* left the station here on her historic voyage, you made a remarkable speech to the assembled officers."

"I did give them a little talk. I don't think there was anything particularly remarkable about it."

"Not even your references to democracy, Captain?"

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Paulsson said, "Look here, if you're going to refer to that, I want you to get things straight. I don't remember precisely what I said, but I'm pretty sure of the general purport of it. I told them that democracy aboard the ship was out for the purposes of the voyage, which was essentially a semi-military campaign. In the old days before space flight was achieved there had to be some one person in supreme authority aboard ships right here on earth, and we were in a good deal the same position. Nowadays the earth voyages are so short and mostly by air, that it isn't necessary."

"I see. But you felt you couldn't depend on democracy aboard the *Argo?*"

"No. Not under the prevailing conditions. Psychological conditioning would have made it possible, but we were approaching a dangerous condition on Danaan, and it might have been necessary even to lie to them there, and the conditioning would have made it impossible."

"Very clear, Captain, and I'm sure it worked well. How did you carry out your regime or authority? Did you mess with the crew?"

"Mostly with the officers."

"And group games?"

"They weren't necessary. We weren't conditioned, and we all got along together without them."

"And did nobody object to this variation of the usual procedure for the service?"

It was difficult to fight down irritation, but Paulsson said, "Very few of the crew had ever been in the service, so there was no variation to recognize. I believe that at one point Arthur Gordon, the chief engineer, did raise some objection on the point of democracy, but not to any serious degree."

"And you maintained your position of authority throughout?"

"All but—look here, there are certain things so much off the record that I can't even talk about them in confidence until the situation for me personally clears up. If you don't mind, I'd rather not answer that one."

NEDRAVISTON was soothing. "Certainly, Captain, I quite understand the difficulties of your position. As I said before, our media appeal to thoughtful people who prefer the printed word to visual communication, and I was principally interested in establishing the philosophical point of view. Would it be fair to say that while you believe in democracy, you also believe that in certain emergency situations authoritative control is necessary?"

Paulsson considered. "Yes, that's a reasonably fair statement. I'll accept that if you place it on a basis of philosophy. But as a practical matter I wouldn't want to alter in any way the system of psychological conditioning and democratic co-operation under which Space Service operates."

"Thank you, Captain. I don't think anyone else would want to alter it, either. But—again purely as a question of theory—don't you think that vigorous executive action is sometimes required on a planet? In such situations as you found on Danaan, for instance? I have read your report with the greatest interest, and it seems to me that the situation there might easily have gotten out of hand if you had waited for the local people to settle their differences democratically, as provided under the charter of the Council of Worlds."

Paulsson leaned forward, cupping his chin in one hand. It was a question which had worried him a good deal recently—how could interplanetary democracy protect itself against those who used its own doctrines of self-determination to set up such a petty dictatorship as that of Boss O'Connell, or embark on such adventures as those of the women of Aldea?

Before he could say anything, Nedraviston put away his recorder and leaned back. "By the way," he said, "and not for the record, do you intend to accompany Miss Deirdonnell back to Danaan for her trial?"

Paulsson's eyes suddenly sharpened and his head came forward. "I don't think I'll answer that," he said.

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The media man waved a hand. "No offense meant. I can quite understand that it's a delicate question. You certainly wouldn't like her to face the charge of being concerned in the death of her father without help, and yet in view of your past relations with Captain Parks, it would be difficult for you to sail as a civilian in a squadron commanded by him."

"That," said Paulsson, "is a matter of my private affairs. And I might not be a civilian by the time the squadron sails."

Nedraviston spread his hands. "Don't be angry, Captain. And don't get up. I may be in a position to be of considerable help to you. You see, we media people circulate a good deal in rather influential quarters, and I think I can assure you that a good deal more is known in those quarters about your private affairs than you might suspect. Also, that there is very little chance of your being restored to the Service before the Danaan expedition sails. Unless—" he put the tips of his fingers together and leaned back again.

WITH that Paulsson sat down again. He was beginning to see. "Go on," he said.

"Let us review the position," said Nedraviston, calmly. "The Space Commissioner is in favor of restoring you to the service with full rank—which would mean you would automatically receive the vacancy in the rank of Commodore—on the ground that your destruction of one pirate and capture of another off Polska, and your seizure of the neptunium motor demonstrate that you are fully capable of performing any duty."

"That's not what he told me," said Paulsson.

"Nevertheless it is true. I said we media people circulate a good deal, and I assure you such is the gist of his official report. However, since you failed to appeal the decision of the court-martial within the prescribed time limit, he is unable to restore you without the approval of the Council. Now, Captain, just what do you conceive your chances with the Council to be?"

"A lot better than you think they are, apparently. After all, the Council is made up of reasonably honest men."

Nedraviston laughed. "The word 'reasonably' is very good. I must remember to use it, but in the meanwhile I am afraid that this is where we enter the domain of your private office. Did you ever hear the ages-old adage 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned?'"

Paulsson moved one hand to show that he understood, and the media man went on, "In this case it is unnecessary to explain to you that I mean the charming Miss Desariza. The group of votes controlled by her father, if added to those of the Reformers, is quite sufficient to produce a decisive majortiy. Captain, let me ask you a question: whose votes in the Council do you think it was that carried the proposal to place a charge of impeding the progress of science against you for kidnapping the two espers?"

"But Benarizin wouldn't—he's anti-Reformer—he couldn't—" floundered Paulsson.

"He could, he would, and he did for this one purpose. I grant you, Captain, that this is no permanent bar to your restoration. Benarizin has every intention of seeing it through and seeing that you become head of the service, as you are likely to do if restored. But if the matter is brought up at present, the Benarizin group will object on the ground that you have not yet cleared yourself of impeding the progress of science. And believe me, the hearing on that charge will be delayed until after Deirdonnell has left to be tried for being concerned in her father's death."

"I see," said Paulsson. "And if you don't mind my expressing an opinion, I think it's a damned nasty job of work."

"In politics it is often necessary to take steps that would not be approved in other fields," said Nedraviston calmly. "In accordance with democratic procedure, the trial will be held at Tara Hall and under the laws of Danaan. The supervising officer to see that nothing is done in

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conflict with the charter will be Captain Roger Parks!"

Paulsson gave him a long look. "See here," he said, "you wouldn't be coming here and telling me about this dilemma unless you had some solution for it."

THE media man smiled. "You are acute, Captain. It justifies your reputation. Yes, there is a solution. I began our interview by ascertaining that there was no ideological impossibility of your working with the group that believes the doctrine of democracy has been carried too far, to the point of anarchy, in fact. Now, if you were to give me assurances that you would do so, I could convey them to the proper quarters, and your difficulties would be solved."

"How?"

"The votes of this group, added to those already in your favor, could restore you to office at once. As a Commodore, you could then commission Halperonik and Harperonik into the service, and that charge would fall to the ground, under the doctrine that the interests of the Service are paramount, and you had every right to take cadet spacemen with you."

"And Deirdonnell's trial?"

"As a Commodore, you would naturally supersede Captain Parks in command of the Danaan squadron. In view of the action you might take to restore order and democracy on that planet, I think Tara might be persuaded to withdraw any charges against Miss Deirdonnell."

Paulsson rubbed his chin again. "And how do you know I'd make good afterward?"

"The group I am in contact with would take your word for it, Captain. We believe you are reasonably honest." He accented the last two words ironically.

"One thing more. Why do you come to me with all this? Why not just let matters proceed?"

Nedraviston threw out an arm. "Surely, that should be obvious to a person of your acuteness. As I remarked, you are merely being punished for having made love to the wrong woman. You are not out of favor; you will be restored to rank and will outrank Captain Parks by a good deal. Naturally, the group I am speaking for would prefer to deal with the higher ranking officer." He stood up. "Don't give me an answer at once, Captain. You will need time to think it over, to consult with Miss Deirdonnell and perhaps others. You have my plastic, and a message to the Press Tower will always reach me."

Paulsson also stood up. "The last time I was in touch with any of your people they tried to shoot me."

Nedraviston smiled. "An indiscretion with you Captain. It will not be repeated. And remember, it's simply a matter of adjusting your private affairs."

The door slid into place behind him.

XVII

THEY sat on a foam-plastic bench beneath an alley of tall eucalyptus and watched an inquisitive bird hop across the grass beyond the walk. Off to the north a rain-making machine was at work. The descending rain was a grey column topped with the whipped cream of the assembling cloud, through which the yellow-orange of a rising intercontinental rocket was barely visible.

"—and that's the story," concluded Paulsson.

Meyeronen's bushy eyebrows went up and down. "Affecting," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"I thought you might tell me. I don't know my way around in these political jungles."

"Ask Miss Deirdonnell?"

"Certainly. It was the first thing I did. She's one of the parties concerned; since she is accused of murdering her father."

"Her verdict?"

Paulsson said, "Not much help, I'm afraid. She had two possible plans. One was to go back and stand trial, trusting to her skill and acquaintances in Tara to be acquitted, and the other was that I should accept the Reformer offer and then throw them down hard. I'm afraid

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my sweetheart can't forget having been her father's dirty trick department. It wouldn't do."

"Agree with you. They'd have a recorded copy of the agreement, and if you turned on them, they'd make it public. It wouldn't be enough to get you out of the service again, of course, but I think it would be a severe drawback on your chances of ever going higher than Commodore. Unreliable."

"If it was a question of handling a squadron of spaceships, I could probably think of the right tactical maneuver at this point, but as it is, I'm stopped."

"Well, let's take stock." Meyeronen crossed his legs, and then fell silent as a girl came along the path, with a mutant kangaroo on a leash. The animal came to a halt, cocked bright eyes at them and sat up in a begging attiude until its mistress pulled it along.

"Nice pet," said Meyeronen. "One thing we know that we didn't know before. The Space Commissioner is in your corner, and will endorse a vote of the Council to restore you."

"If it's true," said Paulsson.

"Must be. Look at it logically. You can't deliver a thing to them until you've been restored and are in a position to make delivery. Therefore, they must feel pretty certain of themselves."

"Go ahead."

"So it's a question of getting enough votes for the restoration. Now the case against you for making off with the espers is clearly a pretext. This emissary—what was his name?—admitted as much to you when he said that it could be over-ridden and you could dispose of the whole thing by taking them into the service. Has it occurred to you that the case against Miss Deirdonnell might be a pretext, too?"

"No it hadn't. I—"

"Simple. She has no brothers. Therefore, she is the heiress of Tara Hall. Now in all these personal rule communities there are two or three ambitious lieutenants hanging around, waiting for a defect in the succession to obtain power for themselves. It's practically a law of nature. But the moment the unquestionable heir, or heiress shows up, there's sure to be a combination of some of them to support her because they wouldn't feel safe with each other. Somebody must have gained at least temporary control of Tara, and about the last thing he'd want would be for Miss Deirdonnell to show up there and form a focus for the opposition that must exist, for he certainly couldn't guarantee getting a conviction on a trial. Therefore, whoever is the new boss of Tara must have been under almost irresistible pressure to apply for Deirdonnell's return."

"It's comforting about the trial, anyway," said Paulsson.

"Now let's go a step further. It could have been the Reformers who promoted this request, but I rather doubt it, even though they're using it to put pressure on you. Unless the trial were very carefully managed by one of their people, their connection with Boss O'Connell's activities would be bound to come out. But if there were someone who had everything to gain from such a trial and nothing to lose, you'd have the ideal background for the request for extradition. And there is someone who fits the description exactly."

"The Arizins!" said Paulsson.

"Exactly. It would get Miss Deirdonnell off earth, perhaps permanently, because even if she escaped the trial, the faction backing her wouldn't want to let her go. At the same time the trial itself would bring discredit on the Reformers and serve Benarizin's side of the political game. I think you can take it that both the case against you and that against Deirdonnell were promoted by the Arizins."

"Well—" began Paulsson.

"And therefore," continued Meyeronen, firmly, "there's only one thing to do. We go see Benarizin."

Paulsson said slowly, "I'd rather fight a battle."

"Consider that you are fighting one. We can take my heli, and I think it would be better if we arrived unannounced."

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CAPTAIN THORWALD PAULSSON found his palms sweating and his mouth dry as he approached the door of the Arizin place. The last time he had been there the door opened at his approach and a robot butler summoned him to the solar to find Desariza. Now the portal loomed forbiddingly; it was Meyeronen who inserted his plastic strip and asked for an interview with the owner of the establishment.

There was a brief silence. Then: "Unavailable," said the machine. "Will not return before 21:00. Will you see his daughter?"

Before Paulsson could shake his head no, Meyeronen said, "I will be glad to."

"The hallway into the library at the left," said the voice, and the door slid back.

She stood up as they came into the room, her hair low on her forehead and swept back into a coil over either ear. She did not appear to see Meyeronen at all, nor did she offer her hand to Paulsson. All he could say was, "Hello," and he felt hopelessly insane.

"Hello." The voice was cool. "Father's at the session. Is there anything—?"

Meyeronen said, "It's more Thorwald's business than mine."

"Oh." The dark eyes swept from one to the other, she sat down and appeared to make a decision. "Then Captain Paulsson can tell me about it. Would you mind waiting in the living room? You'll find a drink-box there, and tapes."

Meyeronen's feet were soundless on the floor covering as he went out. The door slid to behind him, Desariza seated herself again in a little pool of light, motioned Paulsson to a chair across from her, and said, "Well?"

He repeated, "Well?" and then, "I suppose that like the Jason of the original *Argo*, I'm finding my troubles are only beginning when I get home with the Golden Fleece."

"Don't you think you deserve them?"

"I suppose—yes, I do. But there happen to be other people involved. A representative from the Reformers called on me this morning. He said that if I would join them, they would restore me to rank at once, and the charges against—Deirdonnell would be dropped."

"Did you accept?"

"Don't you think any better of me than that? I went to see Meyeronen, and he brought me here."

"I wonder why he should do that."

Paulsson looked straight into the deep pools of her eyes. "Because he thinks you were responsible for the charge against me and the charge against Deirdonnell both. Because he thinks your father's block of votes could have me restored to rank any time, and the charges would drop. Is it true?"

She returned the glance levelly. "Yes. After all, you had something coming. You promised, and you broke your promise."

"I know it. And you're punishing me. Only it isn't me you're punishing alone. There's Deirdonnell. She hasn't done anything to you, but you're sending her back to Danaan to be tried for her father's murder."

"There are ways of avoiding that."

Paulsson said, "I know it. One of them would be for you to let the people know they needn't press the charge."

"I wasn't thinking of that." She slid lithely to her feet, took three steps across the room, and was abruptly and astonishingly on the arm of his chair, her face close to his. "Thorwald," she said, "there's one thing you could do to let the Reformers, let everyone, know that they can't strike at you through her."

"What is it?"

"You could marry me."

She curled her head suddenly into the angle of his neck, hiding her eyes.

Paulsson said slowly; "You'd want me to, knowing. . . ."

Her voice was muffed. "That you think you're in love with this—colonial girl. Yes . . . oh, Thorwald! It was so wonderful when we were together. Can't we have it all back, somehow?"

The coldness was all gone from her voice now. She moved in the circle of his arm, her nearness, the scent of her, the well-remembered touch of her body

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ran through him like a current. If only —he thought desperately, if only—.

"She can't possibly be as much of a companion to you as I."

It was true—he knew it was true. Medea, the witch. A barbarian, who wanted him to promise one thing and do another. Child of an alien and unfriendly culture. It would be hard to build a life with her. They could never quite meet on the same ground—while here in the curl of his arm was held all a man could desire. He swayed toward Desariza. She lifted her head—for one moment their lips touched . . . and across his mind there passed the picture of the ground-car on Santa Eulalia, and Deirdonnell's sudden outburst—*"Ah, Thorwald, don't ever be leaving me, will you?"* and a sudden wave of tenderness for Deirdonnell swept over him. *No!*

He released himself slowly and stood up, his hands on both Desariza's shoulders. "But Dess. . . ." he said. "I'm afraid it's true. I am in love with her, and whatever happens, I'll follow her to the end of the galaxy."

In a ghost of a voice she said, "I believe you." For three ticks more of a watch the room was silent again, then she pulled from his grasp and like a flash was across the room to the hooded screen, touching the controls. He hung in an agony of indecision, not knowing whether to go or stay. . . .

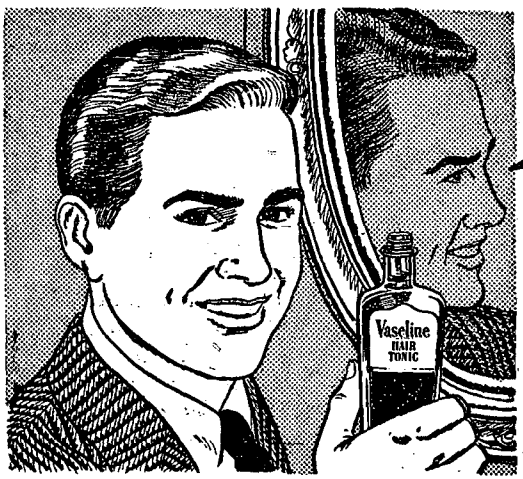
Abruptly the conversation ended and Desariza came out from the hood.

"It's all right," she said. "Everything's all right. The charge against your Deirdonnell will be canceled in half an hour, and when the Council meets tomorrow morning, you'll be restored with the rank of Commodore. Let them try to beat us after that . . . good-bye, and if you ever get tired of her, you know where to find me."

As he went through the door he thought he heard her crying.

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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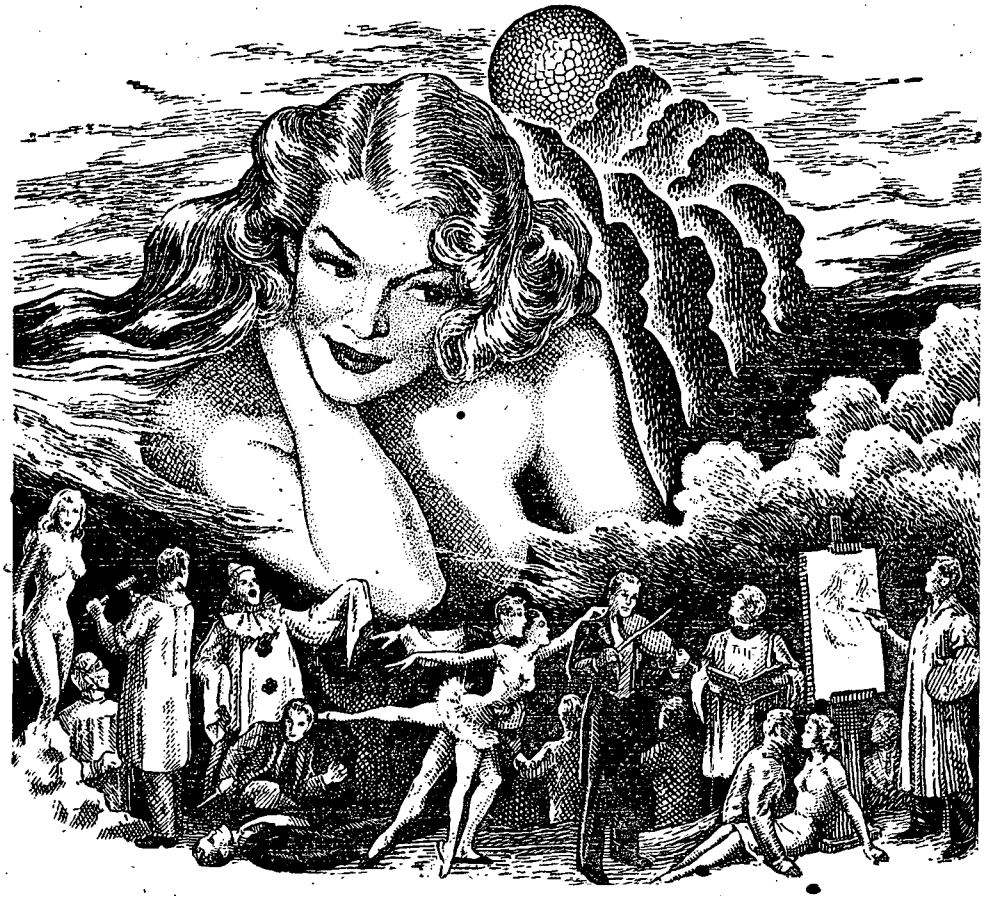

The Immovable Object

By LESLIE BIGELOW

Earth had served as a lost-and-found for forty thousand years—but no one knew

FLOWER-LIKE, with eleven silvery petals, the craft fluttered onto an Arizona desert which then was nameless. Like a laying bird, it deposited a metal ball beside a saguaro cactus. From a pocket in the fifteen-foot cactus, pecked out once by a Gila jay, an elf owl stared down at the shiny globe.

Raggedly the craft rose, fluttering out of phase. Over the Superstition Mountains it fluttered still more, like a celluloid pinwheel with a missing petal. Its crew, who were like men but not quite like them either, gazed at one another with mingled fear and resolution.

Thereafter, men built the Swiss lake villages. Cheops ordained his pyramid at Gizeh. Cruel Assyria rose, blackbearded. From the setting sun to the Caucasus, Legionnaires enforced the pax romana. *Men*—men?—*began to think .... Harried by the Apaches, the Pimas*

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and Maricopas scurried across this desert. Then the Spaniard passed, sweating beneath dented mail, on his way to the Seven Cities of Cibola.

Meanwhile, the globe shimmered beneath a savage sun. . . .

WAIT a minute Lanson!"

I had kicked the globe. It lay on granite shingle, three-quarters obscured by sand. Odd that we had missed it before in our idle jaunts through the Superstition foothills. Yet not so odd, either: these wastes are huge, there above the deserts of Chihuahua and Sonora.

I asked, "And what the devil's this, Dampier?" From a crevice beside the globe a black staff, perhaps two inches square, reared up like a sentinel.

Dampier squinted at me as though to gauge the degree of my understanding of such things. "Charcoal," he said. "Compressed." He began to clear away the sand.

Grunting, I strained against the globe. It was about a foot and a half through.

Dampier chuckled. "Harder, Lanson. A little harder, if you please. I think it weighs about thirty tons."

"It couldn't! And how do you know?"

Dampier shrugged. "Maybe we can get a tank-repair crane out of Fort Huachuca to haul it to Phoenix."

A plug was driven or screwed into the globe, its edges almost invisible. "What do you suppose is in it, anyhow?"

"Why, a—why, how should I know, Lanson?"

On our drive into Mesa for an auto-wrecker, Dampier stared silently at the desert—gravel, mesquite, and cactus. Once he muttered to himself.

He said, "At last." Then, startled, he asked me, "What did I just say, Lanson?"

"You said, 'At last.'"

Dampier mused. Finally he said, "Have you ever listened to a record player with broken volume tubes? You hear the music, or almost hear it, only in brief scraps and snatches. In the same way, I sometimes think I hear some kind of communication. Oh, I don't mean spectral voices; and the language is not English, although it seems familiar and I seem to catch part of its drift. Just then, somewhere, something seemed pleased that we had found the little globe."

Dampier spoke humbly. Like all great men, except such odd monsters as Wagner, whose brilliance seems rather a kernel grafted onto a vulgar brain than integral with that brain—like all great men, Dampier is modest.

I thought of the shiny globe. What could I say?

ON THE planet of the craft with eleven silvery petals and a jagged notch where a meteorite had smashed a twelfth, they are much like men, but not quite like men, either. There they speak a language which a skilled philologist might link—though vaguely—with our own Indo-European family of languages on Earth.

Millenia ago, war having become unbearably obscene, they settled to the arts of peace. Their last weapon they jettisoned in a craft which did not return. Were descendants of the crew alive? From the planet Earth—they named it differently—sometimes came thought radiations which disposed them to think so. But their craft were dismantled. Peace had annulled curiosity. Sometimes, the more impatient spirits felt, peace had annulled curiosity too much.

Now they said, "Near Vega"—they named it differently—"Near Vega, asteroid X grows alarming.

For on this asteroid the spores of life, mutated by a tiny moon of almost solid thorium, had developed Mind. Rather, Anti-mind: prodigious, exact, Luciferian.

They said, "It is the clear and crucial case. Now we must elect whether to destroy this Anti-mind before this Anti-mind destroys us—and destroys much else, too."

They voted. The plurality grew: "Destroy. Destroy. Destroy. . . ."

"But the weapon?"

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On Earth, perhaps it existed still.

"You"—he pointed—"and you, you two, will from now on monitor those thought radiations we have so idly attended to."

"It shall be done, Sire."

"And you and you, you two, will reassemble a craft. The designs are in the archives."

They said, "Sire, it shall be done."

AN AUTO-WRECKER from Mesa could not stir the globe ("She'll handle twelve tons. What the hell you got there, boys?") A bulldozer shunted it from its granite shelf, but could not budge it in the sand. Finally a tank-repair crane, like those used by Rommel and Montgomery in the Western Desert, swung the globe aloft and clattered off.

But the bridge over the irrigation canal creaked, splintered, collapsed. Like a cannonball plunging on the deck of a storm-flung frigate, the globe chuted down the crane bed, through the bridge, into the canal.

"Good God! She's floating!"

There in the desert, on a canal sluicing where the Hohokam, the Old Ones, had painfully dug in the blistering sand, the little globe floated, bubble-light.

"Why, I could carry the damned thing on my shoulders."

Dampier chuckled. "Go to it, Hercules."

The globe floated on the canal as lightly as a basketball. Rather than risk the highways, in three days of sweating, under Fort Huachuca guard all the way, Dampier and I floated the ball through the locks and sluice gates, past the lettuce, past the cotton, past the carrots and the onions. Fending with padded poles, we sweated like laborers at any common task, cotton-picking, melon-crating. But I put it to you that here was an experience of an order different from any human experience before. Down the canal of the Old Ones, of whom the Maricopas whisper still, we escorted the alien globe, daintily floating, though ten times heavier than lead. It was as though a Joshua tree had prophesied in Sanskrit.

Beside the football stadium at the university, we crammed reinforced concrete into a pit ten by ten by ten, the cube dimpled at its top for water. When the tank-crane swung the globe onto its tiny lake, it floated there like a fortune-teller's crystal. Impossibly, the globe rode the water. Beside it, students, their shallow curiosity sated, gossiped of dates and quizzes and hot rods. By radio, by teletype, by courier, the news exploded to Britain, France, Argentina, Russia. . . .

DAMPIER, Sigmund Dampier, past any argument the noblest figure of our faculty, and surely one of the three greatest mathematicians of the first half of the twentieth century. A gnome of a man, half mystic and half logician, upon whose twisted body some faculty members spew an envious venom excited by his mind. If Dampier resembles anybody I know of, it is that forgotten Union general, Jacob Cox, who was internationally respected in microscopy, cathedral architecture, and linguistics, and who cursed horribly in six languages while charging the Confederate lines at Nashville.

Like Cox, Dampier is *l'uomo universale,* the universal man. Like Da Vinci or Goethe, he is one of those men who seem to stand up out of mankind to form almost another species, very like men, but not quite like them, either. If we must erect an idol for society, had it not better be the man worth idolizing, *l'uomo universale,* rather than the mediocre man, the common man?

Mathematician, poet, musician, ornithologist—Sigmund Dampier guided the inspection of the little globe.

From the charcoal staff (assuming it to be a kind of sentinel for the globe) Lassigny of physics was able to state that the globe had lain in the desert at least eleven thousand years. He reasoned thus: carbon 14, created in the atmosphere by cosmic rays, absorbed by living plants, and hence found in charcoal, loses all its radioactive virtue in about eleven thousand years. And the staff had lost all radioactivity. No signal, now, to direct men—men?—to the globe.

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Cornwall of geology supplied another possible limit. Eighteen thousand years ago a lake covered the globe's site. Although the globe would float, why deposit it in water? Of course, both these limits were unsure: the first because in the globe's place of origin cosmic rays and living things might interact differently. The second, because the globe *might* have been deposited in water.

Dampier's inspection seemed casual. But from the globe's dimensions he deduced an extremely interesting possibility. The diameter of the globe was a trifle over eighteen inches, about forty-six centimeters. The diameter of the plug was a little over six centimeters. Dampier then imagined a scale of measurement whose unit was minutely larger than our meter. He called this unit the beta-meter, considering our Earth unit as the alpha-meter. By the beta-meter, the globe was precisely forty-six beta-centimeters in diameter, the plug precisely six.

"Do you follow me?" Dampier asked us. "Our own meter is one ten-millionth of the distance, on a meridian, from the equator to the pole. If the earth were a trifle larger, our meter would be a trifle larger, too, like this beta-meter. Now, if this globe was made to exact dimensions in round numbers—and I think it was—then it was probably made on a planet a trifle larger than Earth. You see? Mars, Jupiter, and the rest of our family won't do."

"Not even Venus?"

"No. The same unit for Venus would be a trifle *smaller* than our meter."

An exciting notion struck me. "Why, then—"

"Exactly," Dampier said. "*If* the beta-metric scale was used, then this globe was probably made by creatures who reason much as we do. And if they reason as we do, then their brain is like ours. And if their brain is like ours, then perhaps its envelope of flesh is like ours. Oh—" he smiled—"there are—there would be modest differences, to be sure. A good deal like men, but not quite like them, either."

Of course, the tough-minded and the "realistic" sneered. "Why posit an origin outside Earth, anyhow?"

Very well: the little globe weighed almost thirty tons.

But the heaviest earth element is osmium. An equivalent globe of osmium would weigh less than two tons. Now were these thirty tons in the shell? Although of incredible toughness, the shell disclosed to analysis a content of steel, chromium, vanadium, and tungsten, along with traces of an unidentifiable but not especially heavy metal. Filings from the shell, microscopic filings dropped from thirty-six hours' chattering of a motor saw, refused to melt in Lassigny's electric furnace, which reduces every Earth alloy.

"Of course, the shell may vary in texture below the surface," Dampier said. "But that's unlikely. There's something inside." He pointed to the plug. "Assume that the shell weighs, say, four thousand pounds. Then whatever is inside weighs fifty-six thousand." Absently he added, "And what's inside is certainly no bigger than a walnut."

The globe defied x-rays absolutely. It was noiseless. "But thirty tons—floating?" I protested. "How?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Dampier lied.

ITS extra-terrestrial origin almost certain, the little globe commandeered the front pages and the radio and you've all seen the movie made of it, just before it disappeared.

"Destroy it!" shrieked a world tensed toward psychosis by the atom bomb.

But how?

"Then drop it in the Cape Johnson deep off Mindanao. Seven miles down."

But it floats.

"Drop it on the Kremlin, then."

But what would it do?

"Blow it up at the next atomic try-out."

Hmmm. And suppose it *did* blow up. What then?

"Unscrew the plug. Open it up. Have a look."

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But just what might come out?

It was a startling week all round. Another small boy tumbled into another disused well. Von Huyghens announced an important amendment to the Einstein theory, suggesting that perhaps the speed of light is neither a constant nor the ultimate speed. Prices went down one-tenth of one percent; and Russia despatched a fleet of huge new planes (patterned after a stolen American ship) on a peace mission to soothe a skittish world. Each plane was decorated with Picasso's dove of peace, the dove that goes boom! as the French say; and filled with gifts and Mongol good will, the planes put down briefly in many places: Paris, London, New York, Chicago, Phoenix. . . .

ON THE far planet they said, "At last!"

"Eh?"

"Some of the crew lived, Sire. They mated, for we perceive the thought radiations from their descendants. Our strain must have thinned, blurred, almost vanished. Their signals are weak. But one of them there has found our weapon."

"Is the craft re-assembled?"

"It is."

"You will train a crew."

They said, "Sire, it shall be done."

AND at the end of the week of inspection, the conference. An odd conference, surely. Camp chairs on the grass around the little globe, as though for an outdoor prayer meeting. Stars twinkling cleanly through the desert air. A three-quarter moon peering down. Outside the perimeter of chairs, a guard of soldiers at parade rest, like the sarsens of Stonehenge around the sacrificial place.

Generals, admirals, ambassadors; a United Nations sub-secretary, a State Department section head—and Brigadier Stravinsky of the Russian peace flight, with three aides. How the military craved that globe! And tomorrow they would have it, by executive order. But for tonight the law of treasure trove preserved the little globe for Dampier and for me.

The flurry of introductions died away. Having gone to school to Vyshinsky, the Russian aides knew precisely how to behave in civilization: they glared and muttered and spat incessantly. But Stravinsky had the cynical aplomb of a seasoned diplomat.

No one seemed to wish to speak first, and we sat to the chirr of crickets, beneath the three-quarter moon. I see those faces still. Noses bright in the moon. Chins bright. But the eyes in deep sockets of shadow, while the globe rode daintily on its tiny lake, silvery in the moonlight, and the shadows of the soldiers rode across the grass like dark pillars.

It occurred to me that perhaps the seeming innocence of the globe silenced us. Had it been some frightful weapon, some hydrogen bomb or flask of anthrax germs, it would, in this twisted world, have seemed more normal somehow. Perhaps we've grown unused to harmless things, with no reek of cordite, no toadstool soiling the sky to obscure our very sun itself. . . .

Finally General Twain of Ordnance cleared his throat. "We'll take the missile to Edgewood Arsenal," he said in a firm voice.

"Missile?" Dampier inquired.

The General repeated firmly, "We'll take it to Edgewood Arsenal. We'll drill the plug."

"Ah?" observed Dampier. "You'll drill the plug?"

The General glared at him. If only these stupid civilians could be court-martialed! "Yes, we'll drill the plug. Then, from behind a steel shield, volunteers will unscrew it. Then—"

"But what do you suppose will come out, General?"

"Hm . . . er . . . that is—"

Admiral Moran grunted. "The cruiser *Cheyenne* stands off San Diego. I say, down in the Philippine Deep with it, 34,440 feet."

"But Admiral, it floats."

"Floats! Nonsense. Newspaper poppycock. Of course it doesn't float."

Dampier waved his arms helplessly

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and laughed. "Won't you have a look, Admiral?"

"Nonsense. Some infernal trick. Now in the Navy—"

Dampier controlled himself to ask, "Does a battleship float, Admiral?"

Damned insolent civilian! "Of course a battleship floats."

Making sure the Admiral heard him, a reporter whispered, "It floats until the planes get it."

"Does a battleship weigh more than thirty tons, Admiral?"

"Whumpf! Er. . . ."

As I watched Dampier baiting the poor Admiral, the phrase *l'uomo universale* echoed in my mind. Why had the little globe been left on Earth? Jettisoned from a failing craft? And if the craft failed, was the crew destroyed? And if not destroyed, what then? A gnome of a man. A good deal like men, but not quite like them either. Some theosophists speak of Masters, dwelling tranquilly in the Himalayas. Others speak of Yogis, superhumanly endowed by meditation. Why has the legend of a race of demi-gods—or demi-demons—obsessed the imagination of mankind, like the legend of the flood?

But now the United Nations subsecretary was speaking. "Gentlemen. Gentlemen. The globe seems innocent. Harmless. Yet unprecedented. I say, etch a map of the world upon it. Then, at some shrine determined by vote, establish it as a symbol of one world, of everlasting concord among the nations. All the nations."

SO FAR, so good. But then, with a growing unease, I saw a frightening expression cross many faces, though not those of the military or the Russians. The do-good expression; the Nice Nelly expression; the social worker expression; the expression of those who called Stalin "Good old Joe"; the expression of those who wrote off Korea but then wrote it in again with the blood of tens of thousands of Americans; the expression of those who either out of folly or political expedience would simper agreeably at naked threat.

Locarno — Versailles — the dreadful names began to march across my mind. Why, these naive fools would give the globe away "to cement international amity," "to foster mutual trust," or "to make the first gesture toward a better world."

Dampier demanded, "This shrine. Where? Where?"

Stravinsky answered smoothly, "In some neutral country."

"Such as?"

"Why not Holland? Or, in Europe's heartland, Switzerland? Think of the impetus toward peace, when the United States relinquishes its accidental find to the world at large."

Smiling, the do-gooders wagged their heads.

Dampier asked, "How would it be guarded?"

Again the Russian spoke smoothly, "An honor guard, of course. Say, one soldier from each member of the United Nations."

Dampier said bitterly, "Some forty soldiers!"

The Russian smiled. "The sacred flame of the unknown soldier is never guarded at all, save on state occasions."

Dampier bowed his head for a moment. He seemed to concentrate his will and he seemed to focus his purpose, almost as though he strove to communicate with he knew not quite what. Then he rose. His eyes in great shadow, he seemed more odd than ever. He said, "Do you gentlemen truly understand what we have here? Gentlemen, suppose —indulge me, won't you—just suppose that somewhere a planet like Earth revolves around a sun like ours." His voice was odd. Wistful? Nostalgic?

Stravinsky savagely demanded, "Where?"

"Shall we say—somewhere? Suppose further that life formed there, as it did here, with inorganic matter made organic by the divine rays which fill eternity."

Stravinsky sneered, "Talk science, man. Not poetry. Not religion."

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"Suppose further that this planet, being like Earth, produced life like Earth's—oh, with certain differences, to be sure, great cylindrical reptiles which rolled about, for example, in place of dinosaurs, the land being smooth there. And men like Earth's, but perhaps a little different, too."

Dampier's voice was sure, as though he spoke of that which he had *seen* in some inward gaze. "Suppose that this planet is a little older than Earth, so that science has progressed a little farther—"

"But what is in that ball! Why does it float!"

The others were troubled by the Russian's violence, yet leaned eagerly forward to hear the answer.

Dampier chuckled, then gazed at the globe. His expression was almost affectionate.

"WHAT IS IN THAT BALL?"

Dampier walked before the Russian. "My friend," he said. "My courteous friend from a courteous land. Listen!" He spoke with insulting slowness, as though lecturing in a kindergarten for idiots. "Your scientists here, who masquerade so clumsily as your fellow fliers, can fill in the gaps for you."

Stooping, he picked up a pebble. "Look—do you know that this pebble, this solid pebble, is composed mainly of nothing—a few atoms spinning in a universe of nothing? Eh?

"These atoms of the pebble, you see, could be compressed into a flyspeck. That flyspeck would then weigh exactly what the pebble weighs. Right, Russian?"

Stravinsky swore softly. His companions glanced at one another with an instant knowledge.

Dampier said, "Now, on certain stars—"

"Security, man. Security!" the General barked.

Proceeding blandly, Dampier said,

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in a MOBILE APARTMENT HOME
NEW MOON
WE FOUND NEW LIVING FREEDOM AT NEW LOW COST, IN OUR NEW MOON, AND, TOO, THE WHOLE FAMILY LOVES IT.
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"Now, on certain stars, the atoms *are* compressed. A handful of some star-stuff weighs ten tons, twenty, thirty. There is a tiny star, technically L 886-6, a cubic inch of which weighs a thousand tons. On that star a man would weigh 300,000 tons. But a pocketful of Sirius or even of our sun weighs more than that dormitory yonder."

Lost in muddled thought, the Admiral grunted, "Poppycock. Of course a battleship floats. We'll haul the damned thing offshore and sink it with our sixteen-inchers."

Dampier went on, "Suppose, then, a button of star-stuff were somehow snatched out of, oh, say Sirius. Suppose it were encased. Suppose it were held stable by the pressure of a gas poured liquid around it while chilled to the verge of absolute zero. How good are you at supposing, my friend?"

Now we all glared at the little globe. The General, even the Admiral, had imagination enough to see through that casing to the alien teaspoonful. Across from me in the circle of chairs the United Nations sub-secretary could see the plug, and by his countenance I know what thought invaded his social worker's mentality: *Slowly the plug turns. Like a worm from an apple, the plug coils out. Then. . . .*

"You ask, why does it float?" Dampier said. "Consider—why does a battleship float?"

Then Dampier laughed and laughed. "Ah," he said, "you Russians would dearly love to have this little globe, eh? Perhaps in Red Square, beside your wax effigy of Lenin, until your scientists understood how to manipulate it."

At the hint that Lenin in his crystal case was no mummy but instead a mannequin the Russions seemed actually to slaver. "You capitalist swine! Warmongering barbarian! Wall Street mercenary!"

I heard Dampier murmur obscurely, "Aristotle, Roger Bacon, Da Vinci, Goethe . . . ah, you carrion from the steppes. Do you think to out-do such men as were not altogether men?"

And Dampier laughed and laughed.

"Laugh, imperialist fool!"

Obligingly, Dampier laughed.

The Russian's face pushed closer, teeth shining. "Look!"

A plane high aloft, homing to Williams Field?

A bat fluttering across the moon?

Out of the moonlit air, dainty, like a flower of twelve petals, the silvery craft drifted. Light as a petal, it floated down over the little globe. An opened hatch. A pair of tweezers, delicate as any spider web. Light as a petal the globe floated into the hatch. Like a tuft of milkweed, the silvery craft drifted away. Dampier waved. The Russian cursed and Dampier laughed; and on certain faces imbecile idealism was replaced by the superior emotion of awe.

FLOWER-LIKE with twelve silvery petals, the craft floated onto a nameless asteroid near Vega. Like a laying bird, it deposited a metal ball beside a purple shrub. Smoothly it rose; smoothly it floated away, diminished, vanished.

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

The plug of the little globe began to rotate.

On this asteroid, the spores of life, mutated by a tiny moon of almost solid thorium, had developed Mind. Rather, Anti-mind: prodigious, exact, Luciferian.

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

A green flame. At speeds exceeding that of light, just as Von Huyghens predicted, the released atoms of the teaspoonful careened into the orbits of the atoms of the asteroid. The greedy neutrons of the teaspoonful danced a sated saraband. Stiletto-flames aspired hungrily to the moon of thorium; then shrank back to a—nothing. On the far planet, persons a good deal like men dismantled the craft once more.

And at about this time (direction from aloft? coincidence?) near old Carthage in north Africa, was born, to a Berber woman and a husband very like a man, the last *l'uomo universale* of our twentieth century, with a mission of infinite hope.

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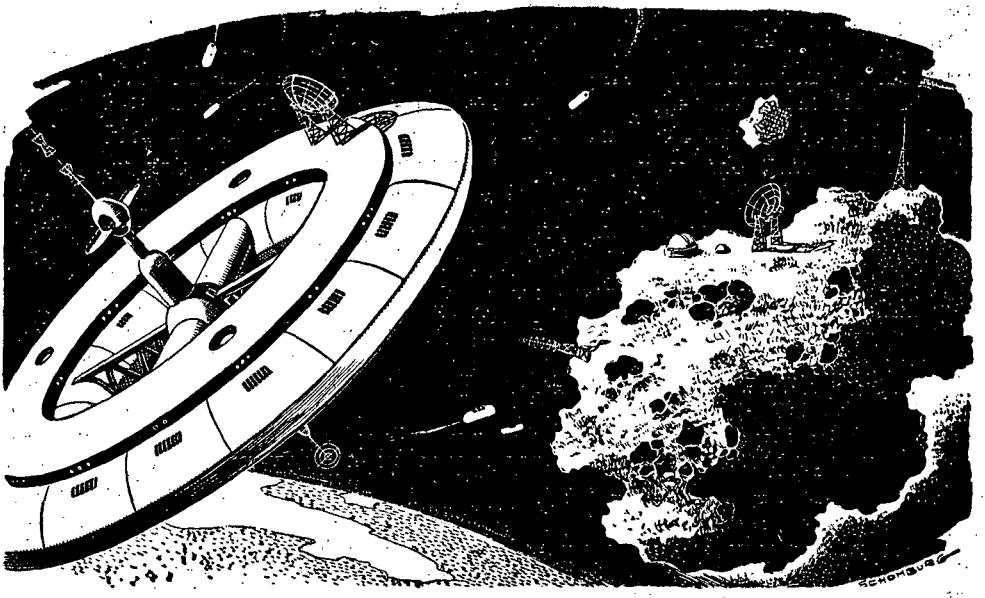

Is there an unseen satellite a stone's throw from earth?

SPACE STATIONS FOR FREE

By R. S. RICHARDSON

THE hottest subject in space travel today is the artificial satellite. The artificial satellite is hailed as the stepping stone to the planets. Once this body is assembled the rest is easy. Interplanetary travel will be here. Main difficulty is getting the artificial satellite off the pages of the magazines and into the sky.

The most optimistic will admit when pressed that even a small economy-size space station is going to cost us plenty in time and money. Recently, the idea has gained acceptance that perhaps we are making a lot of unnecessary work for ourselves. Maybe nature has already provided us with such a station. In view of this, some feel that it might be a good idea to take a look around before we start letting out million-dollar contracts.

The idea that the Earth may have a small, close companion has intrigued people for years. Best known example is the one in Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*. Readers of that classic will recall that thirteen minutes after the travelers were projected moonward they were startled by the "approach of a brilliant object . . . an enormous disc, whose colossal dimensions could not be estimated."

For a while it looks as if the story is going to end right then and there. For-

A prominent astronomer looks at a ready-made satellite

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tunately, however, the "asteroid passed several hundred yards from the projectile and disappeared." The incident was of minor interest at the time, but later we find it had grave consequences. For the gravitational attraction of the body deflected the projectile from its course just enough so that in place of landing on the moon it plumped into the Gulf of Lower California instead.

Jules Verne's earth-satellite has perturbed me since I first read the story as a boy of twelve. To my immature mind it seemed that if it hadn't been for that miserable little body the travelers would actually have learned something about the moon instead of having to view it through their porthole windows.

Recently I chanced to be browsing through the story again after a lapse of some thirty years. Again I turned regretfully to the account of that near collision with the earth-satellite. As I read I began to wonder: would the body have deflected the projectile as much as Jules Verne said? The more I thought about it the more excited I became. Maybe the travelers would have reached the moon after all! Finally it became clear that if ever I was to have peace of mind again I had to get busy with pencil and computing machine and find out.

Jules Verne is curiously detailed in some respects concerning the satellite and (probably) purposely vague in others. For example, he tells us that it revolves around the Earth in 3 hours 20 minutes at a distance "of exactly 4650 miles from the surface of the terrestrial globe." Now this period doesn't jibe with the distance at all. If the body were revolving around the Earth in a circular orbit at a distance of 4650 miles from the surface its period would be 4 hours 30.7 minutes. Of course, the body could revolve in an elliptical orbit in 3 hours 20 minutes and still meet the projectile at the distance stated. Let us assume that it was at perigee when it passed the projectile. Then it would have an orbit with an eccentricity of 0.178, slightly less than that of Mercury, and everything comes out all right.

WE ARE told that the projectile met the satellite 13 minutes after being fired from the cannon with a muzzle velocity of 36,000 feet per second. Later the muzzle velocity is found to be considerably higher but this is not too critical for our purposes. What we would like to know is the mass of the satellite. All we are told is that it was enormous. Let us assume that a sphere a mile in diameter would have appeared "enormous." If it were composed of nickel-iron its mass would have been about ten thousand million tons or roughly a million millionths of the mass of the Earth.

Only a little computation is required to show that unless the encounter was *very* close—almost grazing in fact—the satellite could not possibly have disturbed the motion of the projectile appreciably. The satellite's mass is altogether too small and its velocity altogether too high. If the projectile and satellite could have hung around together for several hours the result might have been different. But the whole incident was over in a few seconds. The two bodies would have sped on their separate ways as little disturbed as two cars passing on the highway.

Readers may object that the satellite might have been much more massive than we have assumed. But it is an easy matter to show that we have been most generous in this respect. Let us suppose that the satellite reflects light like the surface of the moon. Then upon rising in the west it would appear as a star of magnitude —0.8, almost as bright as Sirius.

Verne says that the existence of the satellite is unknown to inhabitants of the Earth because it moves too fast to be seen. Yet 81 minutes would elapse from the time the body rose in the west until it set in the east. Although part of this time it would be in eclipse, still there would be 46 minutes when it would be visible in the eastern or western sky. Such a conspicuous object would never have a chance of escaping detection. Some bright-eyed amateur would send a telegram to Harvard in a matter of hours.

What, then are the chances of discovering an earth-satellite? It is no

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secret that several astronomers are out to find a natural space station before the government can assemble one. Besides creating tremendous popular interest the discovery would save the taxpayers billions of dollars as well as advancing space travel by several decades.

Several considerations make it seem extremely unlikely, however, that the earth can have a satellite as large as a mile in diameter close enough to be of any use to us. At a distance of 9300 miles from the surface, a body this size would appear like a bright star. At 93,000 miles it would still be visible to the unaided eye. In fact, we would have to move it out beyond the moon before it becomes faint enough to escape immediate detection. Evidently if we are going to go hunting for earth-satellites we will have to be satisfied with one of quite modest dimensions.

According to most estimates I have seen, the first space station will be about 200 feet in diameter. What are the chances that there is an undiscovered meteorite of this kind revolving around us?

The following figures give the magnitude of an object this size at various distances from the surface of the earth, assuming, of course, that it reflects like the moon. Although we have reduced the brightness considerably, it would still be uncomfortably conspicuous at close range. Even at a distance of 9,300,000 miles it would be within the scope of the 200-inch telescope. Here are the figures:

Distance from surface	*Magnitude*
930 miles	1.7
9,300 "	6.7
93,000 "	11.7
930,000 "	16.7
9,300,000 "	21.7

IN ORDER not to prolong the discussion unnecessarily, let us settle on a satellite 100 feet in diameter at a distance from the surface of 9,300 miles. It would be of magnitude 8.2, faint enough to have escaped detection, but bright enough to be readily identified if properly observed.

It is barely possible that an astronomer may accidentally have photographed a close earth-satellite without realizing the fact. Large telescopes are geared to turn at the *sidereal rate,* or the rate at which the stars appear to move across the sky owing to the earth's rotation. Any object that does not turn at the sidereal rate instead of appearing as a point on a plate like a star leaves a little trail. With an exposure of an hour an asteroid might leave a trail of a tenth of an inch.

But an earth-satellite would be moving in such a different way from the stars that it might leave a trail clear across the plate. The astronomer would take his plate out of the wash, see the trail, and think he had caught a bright meteor. After which he would forget all about it.

To catch an earth-satellite we would have to operate our telescope in quite a different way than is usually done. This can best be illustrated by recourse to a particular example. Let us take the famous case of a satellite revolving at a distance of 22,217 miles from the surface. If it revolves above the equator in the same direction that the Earth rotates then it would appear stationary in the sky, hanging fixed over one spot like a captive balloon.

To photograph such an object we would stop the clock entirely. The object would then appear on our plate as a dot while the star images would be drawn out into streaks. If the object were within the 22,217-mile limit we would have to turn back the clock; that is, we would have to run the telescope in reverse. A telescope operating in this strange and unnatural fashion would unnerve an astronomer completely. The sight of a telescope turning eastward would be as upsetting to an astronomer as a joint convention of the Democrats and Republicans to an old-line politician.

Another technique for catching earth-satellites is to catch them in transit

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across the sun. The method is simplicity itself. First you project an image of the sun upon a screen. Then you proceed to watch it all day, scan it ceaselesly for evidence of a tiny moving dark speck.

The best plan would be for two observers to work in relays, one taking over for a couple of hours while the other staggers out in search of restoratives.

It is doubtful if photography would be of much help here. The difficulty is that to see the satellite the image of the sun has to be so large that it cannot be photographed easily. Suppose that we have an image of the sun one inch in diameter which we plan to photograph on 35-mm motion picture film. Then on the film the satellite we have been considering would be just 0.0002 inches in diameter. Even on the 17-inch image of the sun formed at the 150-foot tower of the Mount Wilson Observatory the satellite would be only 0.0035 inches in diameter—far too small to be detected with all the other difficulties with which we would have to contend.

Astronomers occasionally receive reports of objects on the sun's disk which the observers feel sure is either an intra-mercurial planet or an earth-satellite. While working at the 150-foot tower I have seen airplanes, birds, and the planet Mercury upon the sun's disk, but never anything resembling an asteroid or even a flying saucer.

Editors like to have articles that end on a bright cheery note accompanied by a list of ten ways for improving your personality, getting along with your wife, etc. Unfortunately, the results of this investigation into the probability of finding a ready-made space station is not very encouraging. The prospects of discovering a close earth-satellite appear to me rather dim. If we want a space station satellite, it looks to me as if we will have to put it there.

Volunteers?

THE MOST TALKED-ABOUT NOVEL OF 1952 WAS

THE LOVERS

AND

THE MOST TALKED-ABOUT NOVEL OF 1953 WILL BE

MOTH AND RUST

A Sequel to THE LOVERS

By PHILIP JOSE FARMER

COMING IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE!

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Bugeyes were in a gibbering huddle

Mating Time

By JOSEPH SHALLIT

There were just the two of them, sharing the same cage, and she wouldn't speak to him. . . .

ROB MALLON lay in the back of the enclosure, in the shade of the canopy, and scratched his beard. He hardly looked at the three Bugeyes who were standing outside, holding a gibbering conference. They stood close together, pressed against the bars, their green eyes swelling, their flat, high-winged noses quivering, their voices squeaking excitedly. This had been going on for weeks now, but it didn't bother him. They had something on their minds. After a while, they would go ahead and do it. It was nothing for him to beat his brain about. At the moment, he was scratching his beard. In a little while,

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he'd have something to eat. Then he'd take a nap.

Abruptly the three Bugeyes left the cage and walked across the yard toward the long, low building. That was where, a long time ago, they had kept Rob in a cage under observation before moving him out to this nice, big, roomy pen. At the time, he'd figured they were some sort of scientists or zoo officials, something like that. He hadn't thought much about them lately, though they came around to look at him practically every day.

Hazily he watched them go inside the building. He kept scratching through his beard, trying to reach the particularly itchy spot on the right side of his jaw. He wondered vaguely if there was some sort of louse in there. Did they have lice on this gruesome planet? Or were all the inhabitants simply a kind of king-sized louse?

The thought amused him in a fuzzy sort of way. Distantly he felt his lips turn up. It was a queer feeling. How long since he'd last smiled? How many years? Some day he ought to figure it out. . . .

Something was happening at the far end of the building. It was just at the edge of his vision, the way he was lying now, and naturally he didn't move, but he could make out the fact that the wide door at the end was opening, and something was being pushed out by the Bugeyes. A cage? Yes. A cage on wheels.

Rob debated with himself a while, and finally convinced himself he ought to make the effort to turn over and have a good look.

It was another human!

A human lying there in the back of the cage, as white and naked as he was, with a long, glossy beard—

Hell, no! That wasn't a beard. It was head hair. . . . It was—it was—

A *woman.*

HE DIDN'T know how it happened, but he was on his feet now, pressed close to the bars, holding on tight—holy hell, a woman!

She had seen him. She was lying in the shade of the opaque rear wall of the cage and it was hard to make out her face. But evidently she had seen him, because she was rolling away, turning her back to him—God, what a back!

The Bugeyes brought the cage to a spot only about six feet from Rob's enclosure, and shoved blocks under the wheels. Then they walked halfway back toward the building and stopped and stood there in a gibbering huddle.

"Hey, over there," Rob said hoarsely.

The woman's hand came around and worked on her long hair, pushing it to cover as much of her back as possible. Her hair was a silky-looking auburn. Her skin was very pale. The thought of her softness dizzied him. After looking at nothing but glossy, hard-skinned, metallic green Bugeyes. . . .

"Hey, look over here, will you?" he called out. And suddenly realized he was *talking*—talking again after all these years—talking not to himself but another human—and he could talk, too. He thought he sounded normal; the words poured out without a struggle.

"I'm Rob Mallon. I've been here for years—I don't know how long. They captured me with another guy, but he died after the first couple of months." He wanted to talk and talk. "When'd they get you? How long've you been up here? I didn't know they had anybody in that building. I knew they had some animals—horses and dogs—I didn't know they had any people. Are you the only one? Are there really any people left down there on Earth? Where did they get you? What's your name?"

The woman made no sound, no motion.

"For crying out loud," Rob said. "You going to snub me?"

The three Bugeyes were back. They came in between the cage and the enclosure, squeaking excitedly. They were lugging some sort of equipment.

"Hey, Auburn Hair, what's the matter?" Rob said. "You sick? Say something will you? I haven't heard a voice

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outside of my own for . . . except for this goddam mousy squeaking."

The Bugeyes were erecting a runway between the enclosure and the woman's cage. It was a tube of meshed metal. They bolted one end so that it circled his door. The other end, he saw, was being similarly fitted around the door of the woman's cage. So that. . . .

Holy, hell, it was just what he'd once seen done in his home-town zoo. . . .

"Hey, woman, look what they're doing!" he shouted.

Adam and Eve!

There was something boiling up in him, a wildness he hadn't suspected existed in him any more. His hands were tight around the bars. He shook them. He shook them hard. He gave a loud, vicious laugh. "Adam and Eve!" He rushed to the door and banged on it. The woman's head slowly turned. He saw dark, heavy-lidded eyes. He saw them go round in alarm. He laughed out loud again. "Adam and Eve!" he yelped. He felt dizzy—drunk—

The woman had turned all the way around. God, a knockout! White and curvesome and delicious. She was sitting up. Her eyes were darting frantically from the Bugeyes to him. The Bugeyes were unlocking his door with their long, prong-tipped poles. He leaped into the passageway. His head bumped wickedly against the top — he was knocked backwards, flat, bouncing on his back. He scrambled up again, his head ringing. Damned passageway was too low. Had to keep his head down. Had to stoop. Run, stooping. Run—

He was at her door. Pounding it, shaking it, his mouth dripping with laughter— "Adam and Eve!"

A Bugeye was working at her door with one of the prong-tipped poles. Rob howled, "Come on, you pop-eyed jerk!"

The girl was suddenly on her feet, rushing to the door. His eyes wobbled, dazzled by the rolling revelation of her body—

Her scream almost lifted his scalp.

She hurled herself against the door, spitting, screaming, trying to claw him through the grill. The next moment she had snatched the pole from the Bugeye —swung it around—jabbed it through the grill. The prongs ripped into Rob's chest—he yelled, he staggered back, unbelieving. The woman was a maniac!

She kept spitting, screaming, lunging at him—he pulled back out of her reach, dazedly watching the blood ooze from the torn skin of his chest. The goddamn maniac. She had come within an inch of killing him.

SOMETHING poked his side—what the hell was going on? It was one of the Bugeyes. He was jabbing Rob back toward his pen, squeaking hysterically. The other two Bugeyes joined him, pushing their skinny fringed hands through the wire mesh. Rob kicked at them. "I'm going," he snarled.

He went back to the canopy and flopped down. His chest was throbbing. He pressed his hands against the oozing skin. He felt very tired. How had it happened—how the hell had he let himself get so excited? At this late date. He must have been out of his mind. He should have known no good would come out of getting hysterical and jumping around.

He rolled his back to the cage. He didn't want to see that woman again. He hoped the Bugeyes would move her back to the building, fast. The bugs had probably been scared out of their wits. Here they'd thought they were going to have a nice, efficient mating, and instead, the female had turned out to be a maniac and darn near killed the male.

The three Bugeyes went away, past the enclosure. They were still gibbering at each other, but in a dull, mournful way. Rob was busy now watching his chest. Watching the slow, fascinating oozing of the blood.

"I'm sorry I had to do it."

The woman! The goddamn maniac was talking!

"I hope I didn't hurt you too badly," she said. Then, after a pause, "Of course, you deserved it. Your behavior was unspeakable."

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He lay there puzzling. After a while, he rolled over and looked at her. She was lying facing him. Her legs were drawn up to her belly, and her long hair was strategically arranged along her front.

"Are you still bleeding?" she said. She sounded worried.

"You — you aren't crazy!" Rob growled.

"Are your hands clean?" she said. "If you're not bleeding hard, you'd be better off not touching your chest."

"You aren't crazy at all," he complained.

"I'm sorry—it was the only thing I could do. Those creatures were . . . trying to make an animal out of me. And you—" her voice suddenly flared up—"you were doing your best to cooperate!"

"Only trying to be friendly," Rob muttered.

"Yes—friendly!"

"Okay, what do you expect? A man's been alone for years, and the most beautiful woman he's ever seen—"

"*Please* — spare the compliments." She looked away angrily. "I'm sure a contemptible thing like you would act precisely the same with any woman—with one of these creatures . . ."

"You're crazy," he said—but he defended himself a little uncomfortably. He *had* cast an appraising eye a couple of times at some of the female Bugeyes, several that hadn't seemed quite as green and metallic looking as the rest. But that had been a good while ago, before he had decided that nothing, *nothing*, was worth making any effort for. As long as they fed him regularly, and kept the pool full enough for him to dunk himself . . . .

"So don't try to justify yourself," she said, "because—"

"Ah, shut up. I'm here bleeding to death, and you give me a hard time."

"Oh, dear," she said, anxious again. "I *wish* I had some bandages. Are you really bleeding hard? There's a pressure point—"

"Forget it—it's stopping . . . What're you, a nurse or something?"

"No, but I worked in a hospital. Electroencephalography."

"What the hell's that?"

"Brain waves."

"Uh huh. When'd the Bugeyes get you?"

"The who?"

"These lice—these Bugeyes."

"Oh, you mean the Grorks."

"That what *you* call them?"

"That's what they call themselves. Why on earth do you say Bugeyes?"

"Because that's what they are—hey! You mean to say you understand their language?"

"Some of it—certainly."

"How the hell do you do that?"

"I *listen* to them. Don't you?"

ROB glowered at her. The girl was getting on his nerves. The goddamn brain wave. The eager beaver. *I listen to them. Don't you?* For God's sake . . .

He looked down at his chest. The oozing seemed to have stopped. He felt a little sorry. It had been something interesting to watch. Something he could watch lying on his back . . . .

"They captured me about nine months ago," she said, her voice lower, duller. "We were living in a cave in Vermont. Near Rutland. There were five of us. We ran out of water one night, and I went down to the stream to get some, and a Grork patrol ship spotted me in the dark, and they came down and got me. Then they traced my steps back to the cave and . . ." She stopped, her eyes big and haunted.

"What's left down there?" he growled. "Anything?"

"A few people—we had short-wave communication for a while with some groups hiding in caves in the Rockies. There were at least a dozen groups we knew about. But then we found out the Grorks were flying in on our signals, and we had to stop."

"I'm surprised you held out this long. I thought everything was wiped out when they got me. They took me on a quick ride across the continent and over

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most of Europe and Asia. I didn't see a thing standing, or moving."

"How long ago did they get you?" she said.

He shrugged. "Years and years ago."

"You mean the first attack?"

"I guess so. I didn't know there was more than one."

"If you were captured in the first attack, it was just a little over two years ago."

What? Couldn't be. It was years and years. How would she know? How could she keep track of time any better than he could on this goddamn planet that didn't have any seasons?

"Where were you when they caught you?" the girl said.

"In a plane. American Airlines."

"How did it happen?"

"How the hell should I know? That goddamn disintegrator they have. The Bugeye ship came along parallel to ours about a mile off, and the next thing, there wasn't any plane around me—nothing—just me and the co-pilot and a few small pieces of passengers drifting through the air. Why the two of us weren't disintegrated, too, I've never figured out. Maybe something about the cockpit shielded us. Or maybe they can adjust that gun so they don't get everybody. I think they wanted some captives. The way they zoomed over and scooped us up . . ."

The girl was looking at him with sudden animation. "You mean you were *piloting* that plane?"

"Sure."

"My goodness—you're a pilot!"

"Well, gee whiz—you sure are quick today."

"But—but if you're a pilot, why haven't you gotten one of their ships and escaped?"

His mouth wrinkled. He wanted to make some nasty, needling crack, but he couldn't think of anything offhand. He rolled over on his back again. Escape! What a laugh.

"Listen to me!" She sounded closer. She had evidently come over to the bars of her cage, but he couldn't be bothered to look. "We can get away from here," she said urgently.

"WHAT?" he grumbled. "What do you want?" The skin under his beard was itching again. It seemed to him that since this woman came on the scene, he was beginning to itch worse than ever.

"Listen. When they brought you up here, you saw how they operated the ship, didn't you?"

"That was years ago."

"But haven't they taken you on exhibition tours around this planet, the way they've done me?"

"Uh huh."

"Then you must have had a chance to see how the controls work."

"I guess so," he said reluctantly.

"For heaven's sake, sit up and listen—and stop your scratching!"

"Shut up and leave me alone, will you?" The damned harpy. He was beginning to itch *all over*.

"Rob—is that what you said your name is—Rob? Tell me something. Do you know where we are? Do you know where this place is?"

"Somewhere in the Milky Way," he grumbled. "What's the difference?"

"Do you know where our sun is from here?"

He grunted.

"You mean you *know?*"

"You can see the goddamn thing when the sky gets dark."

"Wonderful!" she cried.

"What's so wonderful?" he inquired sourly.

"All we have to do is get on a ship and aim our course at the sun till we see Earth—"

"What for—do you mind telling me? Assuming we could get through these doors, and assuming we could steal a ship, what are we supposed to go to all the trouble for?"

"But—but—" she choked—"to escape—get back home—"

"What home? What home're you talking about? The whole goddamn place is flattened out."

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"But there are still some people there—our people!" she cried. "We belong with them. You don't want to spend the rest of your life here!"

"Why not?"

"In a cage?"

"This isn't a cage, sister. They started me in a cage, just like yours, but then they promoted me to this big enclosure—with my own swimming pool, even." He stretched his arms languorously. "Listen, sister, for the first time in my life I don't have a worry. Not a one. I get plenty to eat—go to sleep whenever I feel like it—no clock to punch, no schedules to meet, no bills to pay, no nothing. I tell you, I'm really living—really relaxed—first time in my life. And you want me to get messed up with that rat race again?"

"Rat race?" she exclaimed. "Is that what you call being a human being? A rat race?"

"Can you think of any better—"

He shut himself off. He'd been talking too loud and too long—worn himself out. Stupid jerk, getting himself worked up over nothing.

He swiveled around on his right side, giving her his back again. He was way overdue on his nap. He should have been asleep an hour ago.

"All right," the girl said slowly. "I see how it is. You've run out on being a human being. You've abdicated."

He grunted. He hoped, now she'd got that off her chest, that she'd be quiet.

"And don't you care if you never see the lovely Earth again?" she said.

"Dammit! You going to give me hearts and flowers?"

"But you must have had somebody down there you cared for—relatives, friends—somebody you felt a responsibility toward."

LISTEN, sister. Two aunts I was supporting, ever since I can remember—a house I was paying off on, ever since I can remember—a car I was three payments behind on—Responsibility? Nothing but. Now, *whoosh!* It's all canceled out. First time in my life I've got no responsibilities. What do you want me to do—hunt up new ones?"

"But the people still there—isn't it your duty to go back and help them organize—free themselves from the Grorks?"

"Boy, what a lively, back-breaking project that'd be."

"Somebody has to do it. And we're in a better position than anybody else. We can steal a ship with one of their disintegrator guns, take it down to earth, learn how to make them, organize an attack—"

"It'll have to be some other guy, sister. Some other George Washington."

"You really mean," she said incredulously, "you don't care one bit about the people still left on Earth?"

"You hit it on the head, sister. I don't know them and I'm not going to start bleeding for them. I'm sure they're not bleeding for me."

That seemed to settle her. But a little later, as he was easing into a preliminary doze, she said, drearily, "You might be interested to know how I was intending to work it. You might be interested. It was all very scientific, really. I was going to begin acting friendly toward you when the Grorks came out. I was going to make them think it was safe to put us together. Then, as soon as they unlocked the doors, I was going to paralyze them. All you would have to do would be unbolt this connecting passage, push it aside, and we'd both go free. The scientists' spaceship is parked less than a mile from here."

She seemed to be through now. Rob joggled his shoulders into a more comfortable position.

"You're not even going to ask how I was going to paralyze them?" she scolded. "You might at least be curious, just to prove you've *something* human left in you . . . I was going to do it with brain waves. The Grorks are very susceptible to the slower waves. Maybe you noticed how those Grorks froze up when I was fighting with you. That was because I was breathing heavily and my brain waves were slowed down. It's

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a common observation in our laboratory that if a person skips a meal to make his blood sugar go low, and then breathes deeply for a few minutes, his brain waves decrease from the normal ten per second down to one to six per second. Well, I accidentally found out that these slow waves affect the Grorks at a considerable distance. They shake all over, drop anything they're holding, and then finally become paralyzed. They stay that way as long as you keep breathing deeply.

"The way I happened to discover the effect was about a month ago, when that tall Grork—the one that seems to be the chief of those scientists—when he tried to come into my cage and I fought him off."

"What'd he do that for?" Rob said reluctantly.

"He . . . to use your expression . . . wanted to get friendly with me."

"He really tried to do that?" Rob muttered. "The dirty beast."

"He did no more than what you tried to do," she said bitterly.

"That's different. They're bugs, for heaven's sake."

She made a low, harsh sound. It seemed to be a kind of laugh. It was so peculiar, so disturbing, he had to roll around and have a look at her. There was a hardness about her eyes, a twist in her mouth, he didn't like.

"You happen to have been my last hope of getting back to Earth," she said. "My last hope but one."

"What d'you mean—your last hope but one?"

"There's just one more way left." She shrugged. "I imagine it'll work—I imagine he'll do it for me if—"

"Who'll do what?"

"That Grork—the one who was so taken by me."

Rob slowly sat up. "Wait a minute—what're you talking about?"

"I'm going back to Earth," she said grimly. "I don't care what I have to do."

"Hey, you don't know what you're saying! You mean you'd let that bug—"

"Why not?"

"But he's a bug, for God's sake! I'm not going to stand for anything like that."

"You? What business is it of yours?"

"What—what business of mine? What're you talking about? You're a person, aren't you? You're—you're . . . my kind, aren't you? You're not doing anything like that—not while I'm around."

"I'm going back home," she said quietly, "one way or another."

His heart was pounding—pounding in a manner he'd completely forgotten. "There's one way you're *not* going," he said through tight teeth. "I'm not letting any goddamn bug touch you, even if I have to take you home myself."

The girl looked at him with big, dazed eyes.

"What do you mean?" she said quiveringly.

"Never mind the talk," he growled. "Call out those bugs—you know their language—call them out and let's get to work. We've got lots to do, and a long way to go."

"Oh, Rob! You're wonderful!"

"No hearts and flowers, please!"

As the sleek ship knifed into the darkening sky, Rob turned from the controls and said, "You might be heading for an awful disappointment, you know—we might get there and find there aren't any people left at all."

"If that should be the case," she said, "I . . . think perhaps it won't stay that way indefinitely. What is the phrase you used . . . Adam and Eve . . .?"

COMING NEXT MONTH

HERE LIE WE

***A Prophetic Novelet by* FOX B. HOLDEN**

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"We can't win this fight without something spectacular," Deen said

We Breathe for

There were dark days ahead for Omnipotent Service . . . they'd bitten off more than the public was willing to swallow. . . .

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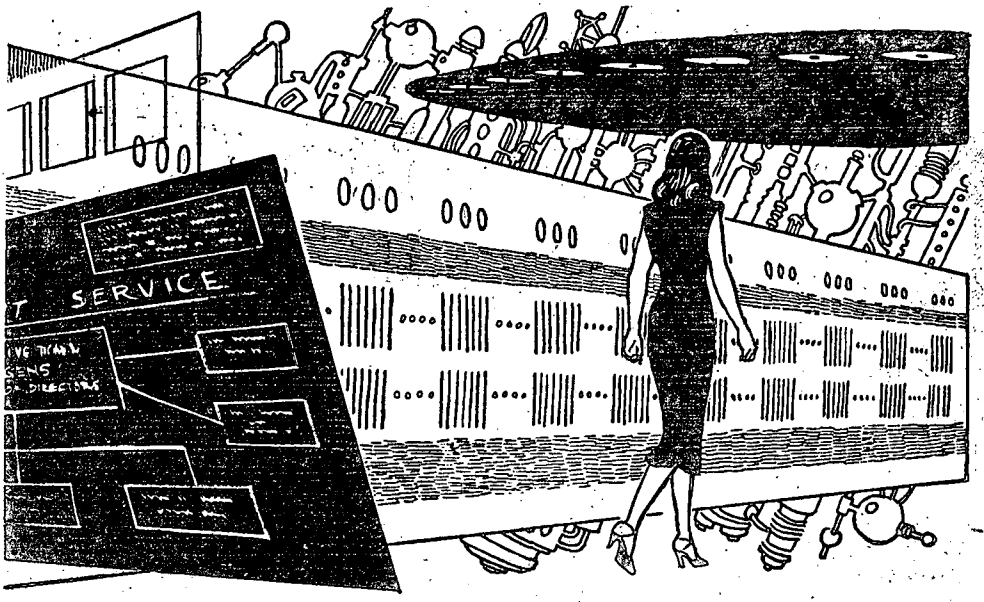

You

a novelet by NOEL LOOMIS

II

THE telepaper unit had been humming for some minutes, but Deen Wiggins had refused to open his eyes. Ever since he had started the campaign in Congress to get the Omnipotent Service franchise extended, the news had been consistently unpleasant, and he had come almost to hate the sleek little mauve-colored machine that spat out zinc sheets at him every morning.

He turned over heavily in the supergravitic field that made up his bed. He opened his eyes and looked at Karin, with the light cover snugged in around her body, her golden hair flowing over the cerise linen. Deen relaxed, watching her sleep. In two more years she would be fifty, but she didn't show it, even around her neck.

"Good morning!" said a high monotone voice.

He pressed one of a row of tiny ivory levers at the left of his bed. The big window began to open slowly, and his side of the room filled with sunlight and a soft breeze scented with magnolias. Of course there was no breeze outside, for it was a hot July day in New York, but the air was fresh and cool and not steady, but vagrant like a real breeze. Deen frowned a little; he wished Karin had set it for apple blossoms or southern honeysuckle, maybe—but they had spent their honeymoon in New Orleans, and Karin was still partial.

He turned to the window. It wasn't a window in the strict sense of the word, but a pattern of polarized magnetic currents that allowed free passage to the outside but stopped everything—light, dust, or a runaway vehicle—from entering, unless one set it at the correct fre-

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quency. Now of course it was set to allow the sunlight to flood in over the grass floor on Deen's side of the room.

"Good morning, Lydia," he answered dutifully.

"Good morning, sir. It's ten o'clock," said Lydia's monotonic voice.

It was always ten o'clock for Lydia; she'd never learned to count time by chronos. She was perched on a big block of purple amethyst from her native Brazil, and, Deen thought, Lydia, like Karin, was good to look at, as long as you had to look at something the first thing in the morning. He heard a snick as the machine ejected another sheet, shuddered slightly, and closed his eyes for an instant, then opened them again to watch Lydia ruffle her soft pink body in the sun. Her snow-white wings were folded, her head turned to the side, and one shiny shoebutton eye watched him while her parrot-mouth stayed open and her crest of orange-and-red feathers stood erect above her head, with the long white plumes drooping forward as she waited expectantly for his answer.

"Ten o'clock," he acknowledged.

Lydia's crest-feathers promptly began to drop back upon her neck. He looked past her through the window. High above the city—almost in the strato-cumulus clouds—the great animated neodymium sign that had advertised Omnipotent Service for over a hundred years was running as usual. Thousand-foot-high letters in blazing fire spelled the name, and below them, in a running frieze of green italic capital letters three stories high, was the legend, "We Do Everything but Breathe for You—and Do It Better."

Deen leaned back, satisfied. That sign had been in the sky the night he was born, and every day and every night since. He pressed another lever. A steaming cup of coffee arose beside his bed. He picked up the cup. Then he remembered the telepaper. He scowled at it.

He took out a bottle of old Plutonium from the cabinet below the machine and poured a stiff slug into the coffee.

ON IMPULSE he turned to look at Karin. Her violet eyes were wide open, watching him. He tried to grin, but she wasn't fooled.

"If things are that bad," she said, "you need a vacation."

"I'll have just this one." He tried to joke. "You can't throw away good coffee, you know."

He pressed a third lever, and saw the thanks in his wife's violet eyes as her own fragrant coffee arose. He touched a fourth lever. A zinc sheet flipped into a chute, and a screen at the foot of his bed lighted up with an enlargement of the first page of the *Teletribune*.

"Good morning," a voice said. "This is Tuesday, July 20, 2190. The lead story this morning is headed: 'Manufacturers to Make Last Stand.'"

"Bunk!" Deen snorted, and reached for the slice of marmaladed toast that came sliding out of a tiny electronic oven.

The voice went on:

"'Yesterday afternoon in the senate the long-expected fight against renewal of the franchise of Omnipotent Service Company was opened by Senator Wickware, non-partisan, of Ohio. He asserted service company franchises are a threat to the future of the human race, and demanded that Congress end what he termed their "long ride on the gravy train.'"

Deen said indignantly, "It's never been a gravy train. My grandfathers fought every step of the way to get Omnipotent established."

The voice was going on:

"'Observers predict an all-out campaign by the International Manufacturers' Guild to restore the world's economy to a supply-and-demand basis. A vote is expected a week from Thursday.'"

Deen frowned. He stopped the paper. The screen went dead. He spoke a number into the lucite bar above the mauve-colored machine. The screen lit up again—this time with the double-life-size portrait of a man. He was tall and dark-haired and his face was angular. "Morn-

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ing, Deen," he said.

"Good morning," Deen said grumpily. "Do you know what's going on down there?"

"I was in the Senate yesterday," said Thom Hughes.

"What are you doing about it?"

"Everything possible. We laid out our campaign a year ago—remember? I'm following that and putting in a few flourishes of my own."

"It's not enough," said Deen. "They're going against us."

Thom Hughes' gray-green eyes were calculating. "I predicted it would be rough."

"Listen," said Deen intently. "Get on the ball down there. We'll spend a million dollars if we have to."

"Spending money isn't the answer. All we can do is sweat it out."

Deen scowled. "We can't sit and wait. This is life or death for Omnipotent."

A little perspiration seemed to gather on Thom Hughes' high forehead. "I know that." He hesitated. "Maybe things *have* changed since Omnipotent first got its franchise. At any rate, the public temperament is different."

Deen sank back slowly. "Do you have any ideas?"

"One," said Thom, and his voice was so serious that Deen stared at the image in the screen. "Sell Omnipotent to the manufacturers."

"My price would be too high."

"Your price will be low enough if you don't get your franchise renewed," Thom said ominously.

DEEN swelled with indignation. "The twenty-second century *needs* Omnipotent—and so will the twenty-third. This company will last for a thousand years."

"No business lasts forever," Thom reminded him. "Times, conditions, management change. Take a hundred years ago—radio and television, they say, were used for private entertainment, but all of a sudden—bang!—everybody got tired of them. Why? Nobody knows for sure; some people say the incessant noise finally created a bloc in people's minds. Anyway, as great nation-wide mediums they're gone just as sure as horses and buggies and gasoline vehicles are gone."

Deen argued. "We do a service for civilization. What woman wants to change her own baby's diapers when we will do it better, more promptly, more efficiently, and less expensively?"

Thom sighed. "Women being what they are, thank goodness, you never can tell."

"Okay," Deen said hastily. "Get out and get to work. Follow the plan we laid out. Get hold of your men and see that they're on the job every minute."

"Right."

"Starting right now," said Deen, "you're on an unlimited expense account. Sound good to you?"

Thom smiled. "I'm not sure what good it will do, but I'll call in the Board of Strategy this morning and see if there are any loopholes we can plug."

"All right. I'll talk to you later."

"Right," said Thom.

Deen pressed the lever. Thom's image faded. Karin finished her coffee, watching Deen with troubled eyes. Deen frowned. He turned on the telepaper again.

Penalty of Progress

TECHNOLOGICAL progress is only one of the horrible things which may happen to us in the future. Hand in hand with technology goes its grim handmaiden: Service. Business of the future will not merely sell you an automatic toaster, it will deliver buttered and marmaladed toast to your plate and even chew it for you if you wish.

The perennial question then is, will this kill man's initiative or is homo sap's aggressiveness too much even for technology and Service? A nice question and one to which we do not pretend to have any answers. But for one viewpoint, read Noel Loomis' WE BREATHE FOR YOU.

—The Editor

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The voice began:

"'James G. Cavanaugh, president of the International Manufacturers, returning from the lunar mines last night on the U. N. Rocket Ship *Velocity*, was reached by microwave. He said the service companies, by shrinking the markets for all commodities, had forced many manufacturers out of business by refusing to buy their goods. He agreed there is a marked decline of ability for hire, and cited also the pyramiding incidence of neurosis all over the world—which facts, he said, support Senator Wickware's argument.'"

"Now," Deen muttered, "they're blaming the service companies for crazy people."

"'Deen Wiggins,'" the voice went on, "'active manager of Omnipotent, could not be reached for comment.'"

"I'll comment," Deen growled, "where it'll do some good." He called a number.

"Get me through to the Library."

"Yes, sir."

"Library," said a soft woman's voice with husky undertones.

In a way, thought Deen, it was a shame that Omnipotent couldn't make a woman to match that voice. But then no woman on earth except Karin, perhaps, could possibly measure up to such a voice. "Archives," said Deen.

"Yes, sir," said the artificial voice.

A small man with rather thick white hair, not too well trimmed, appeared on the screen. "Phreddie," said Deen, "I want you to dig back in the vault."

"I'm recording, Mr. Wiggins," said the older man.

"Don't record this. Use your memory."

"Memory went out with self-scanning microfilm," Phreddie said. "I quote from Bulletin 182 of Omnipotent Service."

II

ONLY the fact that Phreddie had been with Omnipotent so long that perhaps only Deen's grandfather would have known his last name, kept Deen from profanity. "I'm in no mood for games, said Deen. "I want you to go back a hundred years, if necessary, and find me everything you can on winning an election."

"Our election service was outlawed by Congress in 2148."

"I am familiar with the history of Omnipotent Service and all factors relating to it," Deen said coldly. "Have all pertinent material in my office by forty-four hundred this morning—and that applies to everything that was at any time considered by the Board of Strategy—whether it was adopted or not."

Phreddie's white brows did not raise. He looked at Deen for an instant through blue eyes that had seen much but were still clear, eyes that looked seldom with astonishment but always with sympathy. "It will be there," he said, "and I shall be with it."

"Thank you." Deen broke the connection and lay back.

"If the election service was outlawed, do you think—" asked Karin.

"Only as a service," Deen growled. "This time I'm going to use it for myself."

"If the manufacturers found that out—"

Deen said stubbornly, "I won't see my patrimony go up in smoke. I'm the fifth generation of Wigginses that has headed Omnipotent. Do you think I want to be called the tag-end of an illustrious line of economic giants? Do you realize they'd be pitying me all over the world?" He went on doggedly, "I want to hold up my own end."

Karin lay back, watching the rippling pinks and greens chase each other across the ceiling. From somewhere in the ceiling came the soft strains of the first section of the *Venusian Symphony*. She muted it and lay there. "It seems to me," she said thoughtfully, "it's a conflict between two ways of life."

He answered impatiently, "It's a business fight."

"Maybe people *are* losing their abili-

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ties," she insisted.

"Propaganda!" he said sharply. "The service companies stopped waste of natural resources all over the world."

"Maybe waste is necessary," Karin said thoughtfully. "Maybe things just can't be efficient. Nature—"

"Nature has nothing to do with it. This is a work of Man—who for the first time in known history has evolved a culture that can be voluntarily controlled by the evolver."

"Still—"

From the outer bathroom came a roar, followed by vehement muttering. Deen frowned. "That sounds like Bobbie."

Karin took a deep breath. "It *is* Bobbie," she said.

Deen launched himself from the bed. "Our son can't talk like that—even if he *is* twenty-two. I'll read the law to him."

"You'll only make it worse."

He glared at her. "Is the kid insane?"

Karin's violet eyes were darker. "I don't know."

"You said the other day you were going to take him to a psychiatrist. What did you find out?"

"He said Bobbie is suffering from frustration. He needs to find out things for himself; he needs to *do* things. He's had so many things done for him that he's—he isn't emotionally balanced."

"More propaganda," Deen muttered.

"I don't think so. He suggested Bobbie take his own shower in the morning—and I suppose just now he turned on the cold water, not knowing which was which."

DEEN strode to the window and back. "I was going to take him into the firm in the next month or so—but I can't have a—a nitwit like that around." Deen eyed the direction of the bathroom with caution. "He sounded like a maniac."

"I'm afraid I agree with you."

Deen paced the floor. The cool green grass felt good under his bare feet. "What am I going to do for a Wiggins to run Omnipotent?"

"It rather looks to me," she said, swinging gracefully to a sitting position, "as if the Wigginses, like the dinosaurs, have reached a terminal point in their evolution." She stood up. The white satin gown, what there was of it, clung to her. "You've taught people to have things done *for* them. That's the motto of Omnipotent: 'We do everything but breathe for you—and do it better.' Remember?" She threw her flowing golden hair out over her shoulders. "You wouldn't let Bobbie ride horseback because it was too unpleasant. You hired one of your men to do it for him; then you brought home a sound film with olfactory synchronization for him to run off a couple of times. You wouldn't even let him go to school. You hired that done for him, and you poured information into his head by microwave when he was asleep. You saved him every unpleasantness, every possible contact with people and things, every struggle of any kind. What did you expect to get out of it—a man of the world?"

"You're blaming me for all the incompetency of modern civilization, aren't you?" he asked slowly.

She took short steps through the grass to the window. Her voice hinted at weariness. "We've been through this so many times, Deen." She stared out. "The psychiatrist says this sort of thing started a long time ago—around 1950. He says that education did not become generally available until about 1900, and then, rather abruptly, it became the right thing to send children to schools and colleges." She turned to face him, very slim and lovely. "The real disagreement is how far children should be protected. I think we are stifling them by assuming responsibilities that should be theirs. These children rebel because, whether you want to believe it or not, they are too grown-up."

"You turn a kid loose," said Deen, "and he'd make all kinds of mistakes."

"Certainly. So do grown-ups," she reminded him. "The doctor says that back in the twentieth century they took out their frustrations by demanding

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things—clothes, less school-work, more to say about their own education, more entertainment until the schools became three-ring circuses."

Deen was glumly silent.

"In the last hundred years the frustrations have increased. Nobody has done anything about the desire of a human being to control his own destiny, to learn by doing."

"That's absurd. If each generation didn't learn from the last, we'd still be in the Stone Age."

"It is a real question," she insisted, "whether that would be bad." She raised the lid of a burnished aluminum box and took out a small red apple and handed it to Lydia. The cockatoo gravely clutched it in the claws of one foot. She ripped out a bite with her beak and swallowed it whole.

"Many facts are learned by study," Karin admitted, "but the ability to devise, to foresee, to apply reason—those things are the more essential. They are basic. They are the things animals must learn to survive."

"We aren't animals," Deen growled.

She smiled dreamily. "Then you've changed."

"Something needs to be done about Bobbie," he said stubbornly.

"Give him a hundred dollars and send him to the Asteroids. Let him come back by himself." She took a deep breath. "If he comes back, he'll be a man."

"It isn't necessary to go to such an extreme. Bobbie's a Wiggins. He'll come through when it's time for him to."

KARIN looked at her husband obliquely. "Do you know how he solved the water problem just now?"

"No."

"He called Omnipotent. A valet has just come in to help him take a bath."

He chuckled. "Pretty good service."

But she did not smile. "Do you remember the cockatoos we saw on the trip through Brazil, flying like pink-and-while balls of fluff in the tops of the mahogany trees?"

"Sure."

"They were capable. They weren't afraid of eagles or snakes or whatever else might have been in the jungle. But look at Lydia. She's the same bird, hatched in New York, always hand-fed, always protected. She sits here day after day, just looking lovely. The window is always open and there is a grove of apple trees over there on the next roof, just beginning to redden, but Lydia never offers to fly over there."

"She's never been hungry."

"For sixteen years," Karin insisted, "she has lived on this side of the window, and I'll predict that she would starve rather than go through that window to the other roof."

Deen said impatiently, "Oh, she could fly like the others."

"She could—but she *wouldn't.*"

He gave Lydia her second apple, and firmly closed the lid on the aluminum box.

Karin took a deep breath. "The world has gotten away from you, Deen."

He sputtered.

It was as if there was pain in her voice. "Even when you have it proved to you, I'm sure you will ignore it."

He looked up, trying to think of an argument. It was annoying, just at this time when he was engaged in a battle for the existence of Omnipotent, to be talked down by his own wife—but he couldn't think of the right answers.

"It's nearly forty chronos," she said. "You won't have time for breakfast."

He went to the breakfast bar and gulped another cup of coffee. Lydia's monotonic voice came from the bedroom. "Your cab is waiting, sir."

Deen looked at Karin. He thought there was an odd quiver about her mouth, but the light flashed over the door, and he stepped on the plate. The door-halves slid apart. The tube-lid was open on the platform outside. "See you tonight, dear," he said. He climbed in and grabbed the safety-belt. He looked back, but for the first time within his memory, Karin was not in the doorway to watch him leave. That troubled him,

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but there was no time to think about it. The lid dropped. The car floated away, gathering speed. It spiraled down abruptly, noiselessly, for its operating speed was about mach 2.4. Deen looked across the aisle. Phloyd Berrin, sales manager for Universal Service, was reading a print of the *Teletribune*. He glanced up. "Frustrated! They said that about our generation too."

Deen didn't answer. The cab shot across Fifth Avenue at the sixtieth level in a clear plastic tube. He could look down and see the curving blue streaks of light that marked the suburban monorails at the fortieth level. Below that, at the twentieth, were the yellow trails that marked the collision-repellent units of cars licensed for private operation. And from the tenth on down, at every level, was a six-lane roadway on a huge concrete-and-steel arch, and down there—because in the canyon all vehicles operated under lights—was a maze of criss-crossing trails traversed by incredibly fast insects equipped with red or green or blue or yellow or orange lights. Fifth and Madison seemed, in the brief instant they were above it, to be a vertical street without a bottom, with traffic levels dropping away to infinity in a nest of motion and color and lights.

The cab flashed into the next building, stopped against compressed air for one more customer, picked up its fantastic speed again, and entered the automatic block that would shunt it into the main tube. It slowed for a moment, then lurched forward with breath-taking speed. It caught Deen off-balance, but he recovered after a moment and then he looked around.

All the passengers seemed unconcerned. Perhaps he was the only one who wondered, even for a moment, where they were going at mach 2.4. Then the cab seemed to float. Only flashes of sunlight from the open streets they crossed, like a flickering light, were evidence of their great speed. Deen settled back. There must be a good reason for it. Would all mankind be doing it if there was not a good reason?

III

HE LEFT the cab at an express stop and took the fast autowalk to the Omnipotent Block. Even from there, sixty stories above the ground, the Omnipotent building seemed to tower over him, and on top of it, almost in the clouds, was the great sign in letters of fire, "Omnipotent Service." The new neodymium tubes against a sunlight-absorbent black background made the words almost as plain as at night. Under the name was the revolving legend, "We Do Everything but Breathe for You—and Do It Better."

Below that was a Junius Wiggins masterpiece—a thousand-foot-high frieze of animated figures in natural color, all traveling clockwise around the building. The sign slanted out at the top to be visible at ground level in Manhattan, but even at the sixtieth level it was effective. There was a picture of the woods in Nova Scotia—green trees, silver lake, smoke rising from a campfire, fish sizzling in a skillet—and even inside the runway his nostrils, stimulated electronically, seemed to smell the wood smoke, and his ears seemed to hear the fish sizzling. "We Vacation for You," the legend said. "We Build Your Home for You," "We Go to School for You," "We Go In Business for You," "We Wash Your Dishes," "We Change Your Baby's Diapers." He knew the succession well.

This was the great organization the manufacturers were trying to destroy. He felt reassured by the very hugeness of it. He looked up at the sign again. He remembered that it had not been turned off for over a hundred years, and that too was reassuring. Certainly as long as the Omnipotent sign burned in the sky, there could not be anything seriously wrong with the world.

He dropped off the autowalk and took a glydalator to his suite. He entered briskly, sat down at a horse-shoe-shaped desk, and touched a button. Immediately the recorded voice of Miss Jonez said, "Mr. Ghary Foster wishes to see

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you as soon as possible, sir."

"Tell him to wait," Deen said crisply. Foster was head salesman, and he had been calling for help too often lately. Let him do some worrying on his own hook for a while.

A chime sounded softly, and Deen glanced at the visannouncer screen. The little white-haired man was coming, with two big men following him and pushing a large wheeled cart. Deen touched a button. The door slid back. Phreddie said, "Good morning" almost soundlessly and dismissed the two men. Deen glanced at the crystal clock. It said 43:78:25, Tuesday, July 20, 2190, in discreetly glowing letters. Deen motioned Phreddie to sit down, and spoke into the sound-absorbent samarium sphere, "Miss Jonez, I shall be busy for the next two or three chronos, but call me at once if there is any word from Thom Hughes in Washington."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Jonez' flesh-and-blood voice. He took time to appreciate that Miss Jonez herself had an exceptionally attractive voice, and he wondered, quite idly, why he put so much importance on voices. Perhaps because most business these days was done by screen. It was more efficient. "And what shall I tell Mr. Foster? He has a big prospect."

"Tell him—" Deen caught himself as his voice arose. "Tell him I'll be down after a while," he said in a calmer voice.

He took a bottle of Old Plutonium out of the bottom desk-drawer. "You?" he asked Phreddie.

PHREDDIE'S white head nodded. His eyes seemed to be looking far away. "If you don't mind, sir. It's good to see some of the old traditions observed." He chuckled. "Your grandfather was partial to Old Plutonium." He took the glass. "I was his assistant then—sort of a glorified errand boy. Also that was before they developed whisky that wouldn't leave a man a breath." He drank the liquor slowly, letting it settle down over his tongue. Then he set the glass down and said briskly, "Now, sir, I think we'd best have a look at the index first." He took a small box from the truck. "This film contains a record of everything that was offered in the service itself. Then I will show you a longer film that indexes those items considered at various times but rejected by the directors."

He laid the box in a receptacle in the top of Deen's desk. It turned slowly and righted itself. A screen appeared on the wall, and Deen sat back.

"I have taken the liberty of being slightly selective, sir," said Phreddie, "assuming that you wish to take steps to counteract the unpleasant news of this morning."

"That is correct," said Deen, sitting back while the older man watched the screen as the film skidded over it. It stopped abruptly. "General Index," said the heading.

"I take it you do not want sound," said Phreddie.

Deen was watching the screen. "No. It's faster this way."

"Section 1," the screen said. "Basic appeals—The Underdog Appeal. The Fair Play Appeal. The Give Somebody Else a Chance Appeal. The I Am Just a Common Man Appeal. The We Have Done You a Good Job Appeal. The Anti-Wall Street Appeal. The Other Side Has Been in Too Long Appeal. The Corruption in High Places Appeal and the You Have to Expect a Little Corruption Appeal. The Save the World's Resources Appeal."

Deen grunted as he went on down the list. "Undoubtedly saving the world's resources is a stronger appeal than pointing with pride," he observed.

"That appeal is largely negatived by the opening of interplanetary sources," Phreddie said gently.

Deen glared at him. He poured another shot of Old Plutonium for them both. "Different appeals will do better in different areas, and of course they must be selected with a view of the class each is to reach." He scanned the rest of Section 1 and dictated some observations to the tape machine.

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Section 2 was coming up: "Means of communication—radio, television, tridi, printed material and telepapers, personal appearances."

"Hold it," said Deen. He talked onto the tape.

"Section 3. Importance of Psychology. Influence of catch-phrases."

"I'll want to see the film on psychology," Deen noted.

Phreddie coded some red buttons on the truck, and a plastic box was extended from the interior of the box. Phreddie took it and laid it on the desk. The extension arm receded into the truck.

"Section 4. Opinion Samples."

"We'll need that," said Deen, "to guide our efforts."

"—through the wilderness," Phreddie suggested as he laid another plastic box on the desk.

Deen finished the General Index and said, "Now let's see the stuff that was rejected."

"That also is indexed," said Phreddie. "As you know, the indexing of rejected material has been my particular work in the archives. I think you will find this quite complete. Perhaps a little fantastic in some respects."

"The more fantastic the better," Deen said grimly. "We aren't going to win this fight without something spectacular."

"You must remember, of course, that this service was designed primarily to assist in the election of a person to an office—not for the control of voting in Congress."

"It's all the same," said Deen. "Influence the people and you control Congress."

"That's a rather archaic theory of government," Phreddie observed.

"It's democracy."

"Not quite, sir. Competent representatives in a democratic government make decisions not only for their own constituents but for the nation as a whole."

Deen observed him absently. "You may leave this material here for the time being. I'll let you know when I've finished with it."

Phreddie arose. "You won't need me immediately, then."

"No. I'll let you know."

"Good day, sir," said the white-haired man. "And good luck." He shook his head so the movement was barely perceptible. "I've been with Omnipotent a long time, sir."

Deen said thoughtfully, "You are qualified to retire, aren't you?"

AT THAT Phreddie smiled. "I could have retired twenty years ago." He watched Deen studying him. "I'm a somewhat older man than you may think. No, the destiny of Omnipotent is not, with me, a matter of material comfort, but rather one of emotion, Mr. Wiggins. A man whose entire life has been bound to one ideal does not easily give up that ideal. However—" he seemed a little uncertain and his white brows moved together a little—"I would offer a suggestion, if I may."

"Go ahead." Deen's eyes were fixed on his.

"I am reminded of an experiment we used to conduct in Omnipotent's laboratory. I am familiar with it through the films, of course." He sighed. "There were many conferences over this particular experiment, and I have studied all the sound films at some length."

"Yes?" Deen said.

"The experiment," Phreddie said, "had to do with a certain strain of bacterium, and its unusual result was discovered in the course of some work on genetics."

"Yes?" Deen was a little impatient.

"They would take a virile strain of this bacterium—whatever it was—and put it in a culture that was suitable for its propagation. For quite a long number of generations the bacterium would grow and multiply and exhibit all the vigor of a healthy species, but then, for some reason, the things would begin to lose their vitality, and presently the entire culture would die out for no reason whatever. This experiment was repeated over and over, and always with the same result."

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Deen tossed it off with a wave of his energetic hand. "The medium, the surroundings, something of that nature."

"These were scientists," Phreddie reminded him, "accustomed to finding bugs in such experiments. But they didn't find it in that one. Perhaps," he said softly, "there is some as yet undiscovered law that requires any organism —as small as a virus or as big as the human race—which lacks opposition, to feed on its own vitality, as it were, and when a certain point is reached, the vitality is suddenly gone."

Deen's eyes narrowed. "Are you applying that to Omnipotent Service?"

"I wasn't really applying it to anything," Phreddie said. "I was about to add that if such organisms thrive best on opposition, and if it is not too late, Omnipotent has some rather worthy opposition at the present moment." He arose. "Good day, sir. Call me if there is anything else you need."

"I will," Deen said gruffly. "And thanks."

"No trouble at all." Phreddie stepped on the automatic welcome shuttle and was whisked back across the room. Deen stared at the door as it slid shut. He wondered about that vitality business —but not too hard. He wasn't ready to give up, and he had the backing and resources of the greatest organization in the world. He looked at the animated tridi of Junius Wiggins. The head turned slowly, but the deep, vital eyes remained fixed on him, just as old Junius always had done in life. The old gentleman had a wide, thick, white mustache, and wise, fighting eyes. Deen felt the spirit of the founder in his blood. The challenge in the old gray eyes fired him through and through. He stood up. He'd never known a moment quite like this before. He looked at the tridi. "If I had a deck under my feet," he announced, "I could say, 'I have just begun to fight.' There is no deck, so I'll say it anyway."

He thought his voice, his emotions, his inner convictions, matched the light in Junius' eyes, but at the same time he wondered about Phreddie's indirect prophecy. Was there anything to that vitality business?

Deen sat down then and chuckled. If there was, and if an organism needed opposition to survive, Omnipotent was about to enter upon its greatest period, for the International Manufacturers' Guild was not an organization to trifle with.

HE CONSIDERED for a moment. A few centinchrons ago, facing Junius tridi, he had felt sure, but now, sitting there, he thought more about Phreddie and the vitality strain. He took a deep breath. He looked at the Old Plutonium, but refrained. He pressed a button.

A baby-faced man with a large shock of black hair appeared on the inter-office screen. "Psychological Department," he said. He looked at Deen and his eyes widened a little. "You want me, sir?"

"I do," said Deen firmly. "Tomorrow I start a personal campaign to bring public pressure for the renewal of our franchise. By eighty-four hundred tonight I want you to deliver in person at my apartment a complete indoctrination film with subconscious sound and visual tracks, to enable me to meet the public and to persuade them. I don't care if it has to run all night. I want the works."

Jahn Sandiffir hesitated. "That is a thing that cannot be done in a moment, sir."

"Do you like your job as head of Omnipotent's Industrial Psychology Department?"

"Yes, sir, it has been a very pleasant—"

"Then if you want to have Omnipotent to come to work for, deliver that track tonight."

Jahn said, "Yes, sir," but he didn't sound too sure. Deen chuckled. Jahn was a conservative. He could and would do twice as much as he expected.

Deen called Promotion. The head of that department, D. G. Tsanders, was a square-faced man with very black hair that was gray around the edges. He

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wore old-fashioned lensed spectacles, but his eyes were alive and always moving in their black depths.

"Yes, Deen?" He was one of the very few who called Deen by his first name.

"I want you to throw your entire department on this," Deen said. "Get your best brains together and figure out a line of attack for this franchise renewal."

"Hold on a chro! Have you forgotten that we are releasing the big campaign

on the proxy-mother service next Monday? We're up to our ears in that."

"You've been on that for months," Deen said. "It ought to carry itself for a couple of days. Call an immediate council and decide what lines to pursue on the franchise campaign in different sections of the country."

"By what media?"

"Absolutely any and every media available—radio, television, tridi, and especially the daily telepapers. Buy full pages in every issue of every paper in the country. Let's get something on those damned zinc plates besides James G. Cavanaugh."

"Okay."

"Buy up all available time on every form of channel communication in the country. Don't omit even the automatic telephone comic circuits. We'll put on a campaign that will leave 'em gasping."

"It's going to be expensive," said D.G.

"Why shouldn't it be?" Deen retorted. "A funeral is more expensive yet. Call me back at sixty-three."

Tsanders nodded briefly, his deep dark eyes watching Deen. "You'll hear from me," he said. "But Accounting won't like it."

"Accounting?" Deen laughed, a little shrilly. "Acounting didn't make this business. Accounting can't even run it. Accounting compiles figures, and they can show our profit or loss trend within point oh-oh-two per cent. But can Accounting make a profit?"

He laughed, a little too bitterly, perhaps, but Accounting had been under his skin for a long time. "They're a necessary evil," Deen said, "as fleas used to be on dogs. But we'll get rid of them too. Maybe that will be the ultimate development in business—to take business out of the hands of statisticians and put it back in the hands of people who build."

"You," said Tsanders gravely, "had better have a shot of Old Plutonium."

IV

DEEN relaxed in the gravitic field and chuckled. "I'm not as crazy as I sound," he said, grinning at Tsanders. "That's the best idea you've had this week." He reached for the bottle.

Then he pressed a small bar that glowed violet. A woman's face appeared in the screen—a very lovely face with dark brown eyes and dark brown hair combed back in a loose wave. "You called Personnel, Mr. Wiggins?"

"Yes, I did. I want you to select for me one hundred men of my height and weight and coloring, and preferably who

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look something like me. You can consult the Makeup Department when alterations would produce the desired effect."

"Are these men to represent you, Mr. Wiggins?"

"They are," he said stonily.

"About mental and emotional make-up—"

"Not important. Psychology will indoctrinate them. We shall have until Monday morning to prepare them."

"It will take some time to find them," she said.

"I expected that. I will give you until quitting time tomorrow afternoon."

She turned her head a little and looked at him from the side. "You don't mean that?"

"I do, Miss Gharner."

"But that is next to impossible in such a short time. The physical characteristics—"

"Get all the help you need. Borrow from other departments. And I'll give you a tip: make up a regular dossier on me and send one to every employment agency in New York—"

"There hasn't been an employment agency in this city since before I was born," she reminded him, "except for those of the big services and the one of International Manufacturers."

"Of course. Then contact all the big service companies. I'll put a message on film for them before lunch-time, and they'll co-operate. Meantime, you get out the dossier and see that it gets distributed this afternoon. Urge haste. Prepare to screen the applicants tomorrow morning. These men must be ready for indoctrination tomorrow night."

"I will do my best," said Miss Gharner.

"I'm sure your best is good enough," he said warmly.

He pressed another bar. This time the full-color screen showed a long-necked, sandy-haired man with blue eyes that seemed always to wander around. "You want publicity, Mr. Wiggins?"

"Very definitely, Mr. Pneumon. You will have to work very closely with Promotion on this. Call Tsanders at sixty-three hundred and get a complete file of the campaign brief which they are preparing now. By tomorrow night I want a full set of programs for my personal appearance in each of the one hundred largest cities of the United States. I want you to include speeches, dinners, functions, events—everything that will allow me to get in a good word for Omnipotent."

"That could be a very expensive program, Mr. Wiggins."

"It will be. When may I expect the complete set of programs?"

The blue eyes wandered about Wiggins' office. "By next Tuesday," Pneumon said, "we can have the first half dozen or so. Then we'll have more as you need them."

WIGGINS sighed patiently. He had expected this. "That will be too late, Mr. Pneumon," he said gently. "By Monday morning I shall be in each of those hundred cities and I shall be using your program for each of them."

The blue eyes suddenly stopped wandering and fixed themselves on Deen's face. "Did you say Monday morning?"

"Those are my exact words," Deen assured him.

"But you cannot possibly be in two places at once, Mr. Wiggins."

"That," Deen said firmly, "is my responsibility. May I count on you?"

The sandy-haired man swallowed. "Yes," he said finally, "the stuff will be there—but I'm afraid there will be a lot of overtime in this department."

"We will let Accounting worry about that," Deen said, by now feeling utterly malicious.

Pneumon's face faded from the screen, and Deen chuckled. The man didn't look it, but he had the dynamic capacity of twenty ordinary men. Deen looked back at Junius' picture. The old gentleman had said, "Never surround yourself with ordinary help. Get the best. It will cost you ten per cent more and be worth a hundred per cent more." Deen sat back for a moment. There were no ordinary persons in Omnipotent. His personnel

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had been screened from the entire world, and trained accordingly. If organization would save the franchise, these persons would do it.

A magenta light began to blink. Deen said, "Yes?"

Miss Jonez's soft voice came through. "Mr. Foster has asked me to remind you, sir—"

"Okay," said Deen. "I'll be down. If there is any word from Thom Hughes in Washington, call me at once. Get hold of Phloyd Berrin at Universal Service and Allik Minster at International and ask them to have lunch with me at fifty-six hundred. Tell them it's important."

"Yes, sir."

He left his desk and stood for a moment on the dressing-plate to give the magnetic field a chance to straighten out the wrinkles in his cobalt suit.

He went through a short hallway, decorated in soft blues and greens for summer. On his left, behind a wall-size sheet of insulated glass, was Miss Jonez, a very dignified, but very warm-eyed girl with glossy brown hair that she wore in a demure roll on the side of her neck. He gave Miss Jonez a fatherly smile. Then he went down a wide circular staircase with grass planted on each step. The salesroom was cathedral-high; the ceiling was studded with stars against velvet blue; the walls were light-impregnated, and sixty-foot cocoanut palms grew all through the room. At this moment the floor was bustling with prospects, salesmen and secretaries. In the center of the big floor was a circular arrangement of desks, and around the perimeter, interspersed among the coconut trees, were booths.

GHARY FOSTER came rapidly across the floor—a tall, slender man whose stomach seemed always a little concave and whose voice was always sad. "I've got one here who's about to get married. He seems able to buy and he's asking about a complete service. But I haven't been able to sell him."

Deen smiled briefly. "Lead me to the prospect."

"He's over here. ... Mr. Cavanaugh, Mr. Wiggins."

The prospect was a very unsophisticated-looking little man, rather chunky, almost sedentary, with ordinary-colored hair—the slippers-and-fireplace type, thought Deen.

"You say your name is Cavanaugh. Any relation to the President of the International Manufacturers' Guild?"

"No relation," Cavanaugh said. "I just came in to see what you have in the way of service."

"Very happy to have you here, Mr. Cavanaugh. Let's sit over here under a cocoanut tree." He smiled. "There's no danger of being hit. When a cocoanut falls, an electric eye triggers a net that gathers it in."

"That's a relief," Cavanaugh confessed. He sat down. "I've been wondering," he said. "All this huge organization—how did it get started?"

"Glad to tell you," said Deen. "It goes back to the 1930's. In those days they had gasoline-engine taxicabs that ran on pneumatic rubber tires. You've seen pictures in the museum. Well, it seems it cost about half a cent a mile for the tires alone. In those days, you see, they were fumbling. The cab companies had no way of determining which tire would run a mile for the least money, and every individual had different ideas on inflation and care. So the tire manufacturers developed a service; they equipped a taxi with tires, they checked the inflation, they took care of the tires in every way; if there was a blowout they serviced it. The cab companies never touched a tire. The tire people put a speedometer on each wheel, and the cab-owners paid them by the mile. It was up to the tiremaker to determine when it was economical to replace an old tire. You see what that led to—ultimate efficiency. The tire-makers had resources and equipment to experiment and determine the best ways to get service from a tire."

"That's interesting," said Cavanaugh.

"Very interesting—and the start of a great industry—the selling of service,

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where a man pays for nothing but value received, with no possibility of a mistake—for the service companies have tremendous resources. Where the individual builds only two or three houses in a lifetime, his chance to learn is limited, but if a service company is going to build ten thousand houses, it can afford to find out what will really make a house termite-proof."

Cavanaugh looked interested. "I can see the advantage of that—providing you're not interested in the goods themselves."

"We are absolutely impartial," Deen said with finality. "We have nothing to sell but services."

Cavanaugh looked at the copy of the Omnipotent Service Book which Ghary must have given him. "It's beyond me, though, how you can afford to diaper babies, for instance. Aren't babies a little—well, unpredictable?"

"One baby is," Deen admitted. "Ten thousand babies are not. I can call our Logistics Department and find out within two-point-three per cent how many calls we shall have at, say, eighty-one chronos tonight. We have sub-stations and guarantee satisfaction. You've heard how fast A.D.T. answers a burglar or fire alarm?"

"Within centichrons, they say."

"Split that in half," Deen said firmly, "and you are talking about our diapering service. When you furnish the baby, we'll be happy to conduct an unstaged test for you. Now take dishwashing."

"I never minded washing dishes," Cavanaugh said slowly.

"You will," Deen predicted. "It's like babies—there are times you'd like to chuck them in the disintichute—dishes, I mean, not babies. Now we will undertake a lifetime contract to wash your dishes. We work from life-expectancy tables like an insurance company. We'll furnish the dishes, provide a washer. We merely send you a bill every four weeks. The cost doesn't vary. We provide a new set periodically—for you know how women are." He smiled briefly. "Are you by any chance thinking of going into business, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

"Vaguely," the little man said.

DEEN rubbed his hands. "My friend, we have the finest going-into-business service offered today. Tell us what you would like. We will survey your potentialities, your credit, your assets, and we will buy or establish a business for you. We set it up on a paying basis, operate it for you, liquidate when you get tired. You need never even set foot in it. We send you a profit check once a quarter. You sit at home with a good book, provided by our home entertainment service, or take a vacation or a trip around the world—or we'll take it for you, save you all the uncertainties and discomforts and a great deal of indigestion—not to mention a lot of money. We'll guarantee to cut your cost in half, and, to assure atmosphere, we'll send out a can of wood-smoke, frogs that croak, sand that drops from the ceiling, and a roomful of assorted mosquitoes—or whatever applies to the part of the world you like. One day of that, plus a complete audio-visual-olfactory travel film in tridimensional color, and if necessary an approved hypnotic treatment that will make you believe you've taken it yourself—why, it would be absurd to take your own vacation."

The smaller man's eyes had been glowing, but now they became troubled. He glanced at the book in his hand.

"What about the proxy-mother service?"

Deen brightened. "Brand new. It won't be released until next week. Well, here's the situation, Mr. Cavanaugh. Every good American wants a family, but the birth-rate has been falling because it costs too much to raise a child properly. Omnipotent has been investigating this problem for many years, and now we have the solution. As soon as you are aware that you are going to be a father, we take over. The fertilized ovum is removed to a host-mother, carried under ideal conditions, and delivered to you at any stage you designate—im-

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mediately after birth, after weaning, after breaking, at school-age, at voting-age —whatever you say. And get this, Mr. Cavanaugh: it costs an average of forty-four thousand, nine hundred and six dollars for a middle-class man to rear a child to age eighteen. We will guarantee," he said emphatically, "to deliver to you a child of above-normal intelligence, physically healthy, emotionally sound, for twenty-eight thousand, nine hundred dollars. Your child will be without inhibitions, repressions, or complexes—a perfectly integrated member of society. Why are you smiling, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

"I was relieved," Cavanaugh said, "to realize that you hadn't put it *all* on a basis of efficiency."

Deen paused to allow the man to enjoy his joke. Then he began the close. "When did you say you are getting married, Mr. Ca—"

A magenta light blinked rapidly. Deen looked up. "Will you excuse me for a moment, please?"

He went across the room and sank into the soft gravitic field of a luxurious chair. He pressed a button, and a plastic shell covered him and the chair. A visiscreen confronted him, and D. G. Tsanders' square face with the round spectacles was there. "I have a crew working on the angles to use," he said without preliminary, "but there's already news about the media."

Deen frowned. "What kind of news?"

"Unpleasant," said Tsanders. "To begin with, the telepapers without exception refuse to touch any copy. They claim that their franchises through the telephone circuits forbid electioneering of any sort. I pointed out that this was not exactly an election but merely a vote. The *Teletribune* advertising manager then threw the word 'lobby' at me, which, it seems, is more odorous than an ordinary election campaign."

"Does that apply—"

"It applies to anything carried on wires."

"That leaves radio and television. Most of the stations still operating are small and produce their own programs. We—"

"I hate to tell you this, Deen, but the International Manufacturers' Guild has bought up every minute of available time on every radio and television station still in the country."

Deen hmphed. "That's easy. Invoke the equal-time law. If IMG is using an hour a day, then we are entitled to the same amount of time."

"If they are using it for political purposes."

"What do you mean?"

TSANDERS' eyes were deep and moving. "We're not up against amateurs," he said. "The service companies may have thought they had all the capable personnel on earth, but these people are outside the fold. They aren't using that time for electioneering. They obviously feel they are ahead, and they don't intend to give you any way to turn it back. They're using all that time to broadcast music."

Deen took a deep breath. "Could some of that music be interpreted as thematic in this fight?"

Tsanders shook his square head. "We checked that. The answer is no."

Deen watched Ghary Foster walk across the floor with his prospect. What does that leave us?" he asked Tsanders.

"Personal appearance—which is limited."

"Maybe it's not as limited as you think. Go ahead with the rest of your program," Deen said decisively. "Have it on my desk at sixty-three."

"It will be there."

Tsanders' face faded and Deen started to dissolve the canopy, but the magenta light glowed again. "Yes?" he said.

Miss Jonez's soft voice came into the little plastic dome. "Mr. Berrin and Mr. Minster say to tell you that you can count on them for anything you deem necessary—men or money. But they beg to be excused until this evening."

Deen nodded. "Their backing is what I wanted. You may give them my regrets but tell them I will see them later."

"Yes, sir. Just a moment now. Miss

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Gharner from Personnel is calling."

"Put her on."

Miss Gharner's brown eyes and hair made the dome very cozy-like. But her news was bad. "It is going to be utterly impossible to get a hundred men to suit your specifications, Mr. Wiggins."

"You mean, among sixteen million people in New York—"

"A very strange thing has taken place, Mr. Wiggins. It is true we have found quite a number of men who would be suitable—but they are all under contract to International Manufacturers."

Deen exploded. "The hell you—pardon me, Miss Gharner." He thought a moment, while she continued to watch him with yearning to be of service in her brown eyes. "All right," he said finally, and added under his breath, "That man is a demon."

"Shall I keep looking, Mr. Wiggins?"

Deen sighed. "No, it won't do any good. Too bad we didn't carry through the robot-building idea back in 2120."

Miss Gharner's brown eyes faded slowly. Deen dissolved the canopy and got up. He started for Foster and the prospect. Then he went back.

"Give me Public Opinion," he told Miss Jonez.

A man's face appeared—the face of a young man with dark hair and an eternal question mark in his eyes. "You want me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Deen. "Find out how the people feel about this franchise."

"When do you wish a report?"

"At eighty-two hundred this evening."

Walltr Ghreen's eyes didn't waver. "We'll have it. How about a second sample?"

"Every day," said Deen, "I want a report as of that day."

Ghreen nodded. "It will be ready, Mr. Wiggins."

V

DEEN went looking for Ghary Foster. The lanky salesman was having coffee alone in Omnipotent's luxurious silver-and-white coffee shop. He pushed the solid silver sugar bowl at Deen as the waitress, a platinum blond in an orchid-colored uniform, set his coffee before him. "What happened?" asked Deen.

Ghary said dolefully, "He got tired of waiting. Said he'd think it over." He watched Deen stir his coffee. "I tell you Deen, selling service is getting rough. Our sales structure has got to be revised."

"Maybe," said Deen thoughtfully. "Maybe IMG is behind it. I'm beginning to think they've been working behind the scenes for a long time. Do you realize there are practically no media in the United States that we can use to put over our arguments on the franchise campaign?"

"There is always direct mail."

"Of course—but we need something bigger, more spectacular."

"If," Ghary began, "we could duplicate the Big Sign in every city in the country, and if we could have your picture reproduced, for instance, as the son and grandson and great-grandson and all, of the founders of the service companies who saved the world's resources, and if we could use color and sound and smell and taste—"

Deen set his coffee down so suddenly he spilled it. "You've got it!" he shouted. "That's it!"

But Ghary shook his head. "It would take months to build a sign like this."

Deen got up. "I'm going up to Industrial Projection," he said jubilantly. He slapped Ghary on the back. "Keep trying. We'll win this battle yet. You have just given me the brain-storm of the twenty-second-century."

He strode across the floor and mounted the broad stairway.

A magenta light was blinking at Miss Jonez's door. He stepped inside. "I'll take it here," he said. Then he smiled, for Miss Jonez looked concerned for him. "It is a request for a private screen, sir."

"Very well." He sat down in a soundproof booth. The door closed slowly behind him. It was cool in there, and

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it struck him suddenly that that was the quiestest place he'd seen all day. Then he came alert. The face in the illumined screen was Karin's. She looked very trim in a green traveling-suit, and she wore a brown hat with a smart feather in it. Her brown eyes and her golden hair were striking. "Karin!"

"Hello, Deen." Her voice was unusually husky. "I'm sorry to tell you this way, but I've never been able to tell you any other way."

"I don't—"

"Please don't interrupt until I finish. I am leaving for my parents' ranch in Colorado. I'm going to turn Bobbie loose out there and see if he still has what it takes to make a man out of him."

"Well, now, wait a minute. I can't—"

"You can't get away," she said. "I know. But you are not invited, Deen. Partly for Bobbie's good, and perhaps partly for my own, I'm leaving you for good. I've tried to tell you to your face, but you always turn me off. So it's this way. I'm sorry, Deen. We once had good times together, but I guess we've grown apart."

To cover the strange feeling in his stomach, Deen growled, "So you're deserting the sinking ship."

"If it's sinking," she said, "you haven't admitted it." She looked straight in his eyes. "I still think you're the best go-getter in the world, Deen, and I expect you to pull out as you always have. No, I'm quitting now so nobody can say I *did* desert the ship—which they certainly would if you should lose and I left later."

"How much alimony do you want?" he asked hoarsely.

"None." She was firm. "Save it for the business. Good-by Deen."

"Good-by," he mumbled as her image faded.

He stumbled out of the booth. So Karin was gone. He was in the hall before he collected his wits. This was no time to go to pieces. He went back inside. "Miss Jonez, I will be in Industrial Projection for some time."

"Yes, sir."

INDUSTRIAL PROJECTION was a huge place of gleaming white plastic floors, soft blue walls shading into the thinnest cloud blue at the top, a sound-absorbent ceiling, blue-topped tables burdened with glittering glass, silver-handled drawers, and automagnetic cabinet doors.

Deen Wiggins walked through. With the complexity of equipment, the bubbling liquids, the glowing electronic tubes, and the small signs of almost invisible activity on every hand, the place seemed almost deserted, for only here and there was a white-coated attendant reading a gauge or a dial or watching an ion-exchange column and writing data on paper held in a clipboard.

Deen went into the office, a rather small place without equipment but still with the chemical smell of the laboratory. A white-coated man sat at a blue glass desk. He looked up. "Good morning, Mr. Wiggins."

"Morning, Lyol."

Lyol Kamol was not a young man. His hair was white. He had a big face, and black eyes that never took anything for granted.

Deen watched the tiny model of the Big Sign standing on a pedestal in the middle of the floor, turning—slowly, it seemed—flashing lights, emitting electronic smells and sounds. This was the control for the Big Sign and also the indicator. Lyol had built it long before Deen's birth.

Deen made as if to sit in the empty air, but a gravitic field sprang up to hold him. He sat there with his knees crossed. Lyol said, "Have a cigarette?"

Deen took one. He drew on it and it began to burn. He exhaled a twin column of smoke from his nostrils. "I need some technical help," he said at last.

Kamol nodded. "The telepaper news was not reassuring this morning."

"It was bad," said Deen, "and has gotten steadily worse all day."

"If my department can help—"

"You can," said Deen. "In fact, if somebody doesn't accomplish more than I have accomplished today, we're hamstrung. Here's the situation: the elec-

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tion is nine days off and IMG has us beaten to a fistful of soggy positrons." He looked at his cigarette. He tossed it at the desk. It intercepted a black-light beam. A tiny net scooped it up, dropped it into a receptacle, and closed the lid. "Our only chance is to bring public opinion to bear before the vote, but they've got all ordinary channels of communication closed to us. We've got to have something effective—something that will reach millions and millions of people in a spectacular manner—and it must be a surprise." He paused and looked at the model of the big sign. "It must be as big as the sky." He paused and added, "I think I've got the answer—if you can do it."

"I'm listening," said Kamol. . . .

DEEN didn't reach his own desk until sixty-five hundred. A facsimile of Tsanders' report had come in on the zinc plates and was waiting at his desk. He took the plates down to the private lunch-room and looked them over. D. G. had the picture, all right.

A page brought him a report from Ghreen at Public Opinion before he finished his salad. "Percentage of the voting population in favor of renewing the franchise, fourteen. Opposed, fifty-two per cent. Haven't decided, twenty-two per cent. Not interested, twelve per cent."

He had a telescreen conference with Kamol late that afternoon. "We believe we can do what you want," said Kamol, "but we don't dare test it out anywhere, for fear IMG will be warned."

"By all means keep it under your hat," Deen said. "Be careful whom you put to work on it."

"I have been—shall we say—selective."

"Then keep on being selective. This IMG organization is not a bunch of fools. The only way we can handle them is by surprise."

"When do you expect to—unveil our creation?"

"The vote comes Thursday. I would say the unveiling should be Tuesday evening. Send one of your own men to each of the hundred cities with the equipment. See that he follows the program laid out by Publicity for each locale."

"It will be done," said Kamol. . . .

AT SEVENTY-SIX Deen was home in the apartment. At eighty-four a messenger appeared with a gadget that reminded him of the sleek little mauve-colored machine at his bedside.

"It's loaded," the messenger explained. "All you have to do is break the seal and attach the terminals to your pillow. The machine will do the rest."

"Thanks." Deen was brief. The apartment wasn't the same without Karin. He got into his spinlon pajamas, that felt like nothing at all, and walked the grass floor in his bare feet and fed an apple to Lydia. The maid had taken care of the apartment, and he assumed she would continue to do so. He turned on the breeze and tried a touch of magnolia in it, but he turned it off, and wondered briefly where Karin was at that moment. Probably at the ranch—perhaps sitting around a roaring log fire. He shuddered. Primitive things.

Her parents had always refused the comforts of civilization as exemplified by Omnipotent. He'd tried to sell them the business service—in fact, he'd tried to give it to them, but they would have none of it. Karin's father, a small man but quite old and nevertheless quite straight, declined the comforts of modernity. Karin said her father even took a gun at times and went out to kill wild animals. Deen shivered. How utterly crude! Nevertheless, they were Karin's parents.

Come to think of it, though, it was Karin who would have to be persuaded. Didn't Omnipotent have a placation service of some sort? He thumbed through the catalog. Yes, there it was. Page 152. Omnipotent would guarantee to reconcile any estranged husband or wife if it could possibly be done, without the least effort on the part of the other mate. The charge was very reasonable too, based on mileage and time. Omnipotent had

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specially trained psychologists who did nothing else.

Well, that took care of that. He fed Lydia a bonus apple, took one last look at the Big Sign revolving in the sky, and went to bed. He examined the seal on the psycho-conditioner, listened for Jahn Sandiffir's first code words, and went to sleep. In the morning he would be the perfect extrovert. . . .

VI

THE next day the percentage of voters in favor of the franchise was down to thirteen. Opposed, fifty-three per cent. Hadn't decided, twenty-three per cent. Not interested, down to ten per cent. Deen felt pleased. Though the trend was against them, those not interested were fewer. It was a good sign. He wanted everybody to take sides, to be interested. If a man was interested, you could do something with him. Of course there was a certain hard core, you might say, of voters who would never listen and never change. But at least fifty-five per cent of those now opposed could be swung—perhaps more. And practically all of those now undecided or uninterested could be appealed to—providing the appeal could be made big enough, spectacular enough, moving enough.

He called Walltr Ghreen. "Beginning next Tuesday evening at seventy-two hundred," he said, "I want a report every four chronos until the vote is cast."

The question marks in Ghreen's eyes grew brighter. "That's twenty-five reports a day."

"That's right."

Ghreen paused for a millichron. Then, "You'll get them."

Thom Hughes reported from Washington: lots of activity but no apparent progress. Lyol Kamol reported that he had turned over plans to the manufacturing division. James G. Cavanaugh was in D. C. conferring with Senator Wickware. Omnipotent's salesroom was crowded with people making what they thought might be their last purchases of service. Omnipotent's sales total was above normal; Universal's was phenomenally high, and so was International's. Deen reflected with grim satisfaction that there were some persons who would not be pleased to see the service companies go to the wall.

On Saturday evening he took a jet-cab to D. C. and went into conference with Thom Hughes and the Board. He became satisfied that they were doing everything possible, and returned to New York. He kept in hourly touch with the home office in Manhattan, and took Ghreen's public opinion reports from the facsimile plates that came out of the mauve-colored machine. The feeling toward Omnipotent swung up a little, then leveled off, but the level was far too low. By Tuesday noon only sixteen per cent favored renewal and almost fifty-two per cent still opposed it. But Deen got reports on the quantity of mail daily received by congressmen and was satisfied. The mail had not yet risen beyond normal proportions. Wednesday, he knew, would be the day. . . .

Tuesday night he was having dinner with Thom Huges and the Washington staff when a young man from the Washington office came in and whispered to Thom. Thom listened, frowned, glanced at Deen, listened some more, and looked puzzled. The messenger left. Thom said to Deen, "It sounds to me as if you've been up to something."

"I'm trying to save Omnipotent," said Deen casually.

Thom put down his napkin. "I think we'd better go have a look."

But Deen said calmly, "I'm still on my melon."

Thom stared at him. "Don't you want to know how it's coming?"

"Naturally." Deen finished the melon and pushed it back. "But it's too early to know that. Let's finish our dinner."

"Don't you even want to know how it looks?"

"I have a pretty good idea," Deen said, and cut into his steak.

Then the rolling, sonorous tones of a great voice came to them. It seemed

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to pervade the room from all sides at once. Thom got up. "You can eat all night if you want to, but I'm going to have a look."

Deen sighed. "All right, I'll go along with you." The rest of the staff got up with them. Deen observed that and smiled to himself. Let the manufacturers defeat their application for a franchise and these hirelings would be as quick to ignore him. He looked at Thom. He still liked Thom, for Thom was obedient but not subservient.

THEY came out on a balcony at the twenty-second floor of Omnipotent's Washington branch. The booming, rolling tones of a voice came to them—a giant, but still human, voice that spoke words.

". . . forced to adopt this way of speaking to the people, for the International Manufacturers' Guild has closed every ordinary channel of communication to us—radio, television, telepapers. . . .

"They hoped to win this fight without letting the people know both sides of the question. But we feel the people should know. We do not ask for special privilege. We ask merely for our rights as citizens. A great structure—many structures—that have served mankind well and faithfully and have saved the resources of the world at a time when those resources were not replaceable . . . led mankind to a fuller, richer life . . . and now they try to take away our business, our work, the jobs of a million and a half faithful employees—and all this without giving us a chance to be heard. All we ask is a chance to be heard. All we ask is the right to present our side. Then the people can decide, as the people have always decided. . . ."

"Great guns!" Thom Hughes shook his head slowly. "I'd swear that was your voice, Deen."

"It is," said Deen. "Recorded, of course, and projected in a manner that actually reaches the hearing subsonically. The rolling, booming sound is merely for effect."

"It sounds like a thunderstorm coming up from the Potomac."

Deen said dryly, "What would you have it sound like—grasshoppers rubbing their legs together?"

Thom shook his head. "It sounds as if—as if you're fighting for your existence. It will have a terrific appeal. But—" He stopped.

"You didn't suppose," Deen said dryly, "that I could depart from custom, that I could do something different, new, unusual."

"Well, yes," said Thom. "But after all, the dignity of a great institution like Omnip—"

"Dignity be damned! This is a matter of life and death!"

"And yet I wonder," said Thom thoughtfully, "if such a huge structure as Omnipotent can divorce itself from dignity. It seems to me there is a point at which any person or organization must acquire dignity if they do not already have it. In other words, dignity is a necessary ingredient of great growth."

"You're talking a lot," said Deen, "when you might be listening—and looking."

Thom looked up—and up and up. His eyes opened wide. "That huge figure against the clouds!" he said. "That's you—in color."

"Or a reasonable facsimile thereof."

"Well, that—that is impressive. In fact, it's overwhelming. Your bust looks to be a couple of thousand feet high, and I'd say it's at an altitude of ten or twelve thousand feet."

Deen nodded. "It took a lot of skywriters to throw the smoke-screen to provide the background for that picture. You can't see it, but they're still up there, holding a screen, you might say, for the projection."

"It's a giant in the sky, talking," said one of the staff, awe-stricken. "And the giant is you, Mr. Wiggins."

The huge lips continued to move, and words continued to rumble from the great mouth. Thom Hughes sniffed. "I smell cherry blossoms—but it isn't the season for cherry blossoms."

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"Electronic," Deen said. "Anything to have a pleasant effect on the people."

Thom pointed at the balconies below them, crammed with people; at the auto-walks and cross-walks, where people were riding with heads thrown back. "How long will this go on?" he asked.

"At intervals until midnight."

"Well, it's impressive—but what are the people in the street thinking?"

"We can find out." Deen took him to his private office and turned on a large screen on the wall. "I've had a number of spotting scanners set up at different places over the city," he said. "Let's try the cross-walk at Pennsylvania Avenue and E Street." He pressed a bar. The screen seemed to be above two women—one young, one middle-aged. The middle-aged one said, "What do you think of that, anyway? Isn't it just a stunt?"

The younger one said, "Of course it's a stunt, but if the manufacturers closed off all communication channels—they've got to do something, haven't they? How are the people going to know things like this when somebody stops their opponent from talking?" She reached down to pull up her stocking. "Darn!" she said. "A run—and they aren't over six months old!"

"You're ready for a different color anyway. Those fluorescent shades call attention to a woman's legs, all right, but they get a little hard on the eyes, too."

Deen smiled. "An older woman *would* say that." He turned a dial. "We'll try the union terminal—just outside of the machine shop."

HERE three men were looking into the sky. All were in overalls; one had a hammer in his hip pocket. "That's a lot of talk," said the one with the hammer. "Those big outfits got billions."

A man with a gray-haired mustache said, "They got some awful payrolls, too. My wife's sister's husband works for Omnipotent here in Washington. He says they've got fourteen thousand on the payroll—and you know it takes a lot of money to meet a payroll like that."

"They've had their crack at the profits," the man with the hammer said.

"For that matter, so have the manufacturers. In fact, the manufacturers had first crack a couple of hundred years before the service companies."

"I'm against anybody that's so big," said the younger man.

"The manufacturers are big." The older man watched the animated figure in the sky, listened to the rolling, sonorous tones. "I'm for everybody getting a chance to speak their piece—and it doesn't look like that happened here."

Deen cut the screen. "You see how it goes, gentlemen."

"I see hope," said Thom. "But this is only one town. How—"

"This exact scene is taking place in every town of any size along the Atlantic seaboard," said Deen. "New York City has been divided into twenty-two districts, and there is one performance in each district every four chronos. As the sun moves west, our program will move west also. By midnight, eastern time, the one hundred largest cities in the country will be blanketed with these projections. And we'll benefit not only from the projections themselves, but from the free publicity we get through the telepapers and the independent radio stations. As advertising, we were too hot to touch," he said complacently, "but as news we are too hot to ignore."

The facsimile machine snicked a zinc sheet into the tray. Deen picked it up. "Here's the first hourly public opinion poll from Ghreen," he said. "Favoring renewal, twenty-three per cent—up five per cent since noon. Let's finish our dinner, gentlemen."

After dinner the favorable percentage had risen to twenty-eight per cent and was still climbing. The sky—the whole world, it seemed—was filled with the great colored image of Deen Wiggins and his tremendous, booming words.

Thom Hughes shook his head. "It's terrific," he said. "It's not so much what you say; it's not just the bigness of it, but somehow the sound gets inside of you and does something to you. It makes you think of a man striding out of the

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clouds, coming to fight for his rights. It's overwhelming, Deen."

"Just why," Deen asked with satisfaction, "did you think Omnipotent had become the greatest service organization on earth?"

BY COFFEE-TIME in the morning the favoring percentage had risen to thirty-two—"and no sign of leveling off," Ghreen reported.

"IMG overdid it," Deen said. "Now they'll pay."

By noon that day, letters and telegrams were pouring into Washington. "Senator Wickware just sent the morning's mail to the incinerators." Thom chuckled. "Our spies report 6,382 pounds of mail favoring, with 2,194 pounds against. That's enough to make even Wickware hesitate."

Deen went to the facsimile machine. "Here's my program for today," he said, "laid out by Pneumon. We'll have to get busy. I'm scheduled to lay the cornerstone on a new croquet court—what the hell!"

Thom smiled. "Never mind. Every time you take a drink of water today, you'll get your picture in the telepapers."

"What's our score now?"

"Still climbing, but not so fast. Ghreen says it's natural to expect a leveling off. The significant factor is that those opposed to the franchise are now down to thirty-one per cent! IMG is whipped!"

Deen said thoughtfully, "The vote is tomorrow—and even a non-partisan like Wickware can't ignore public opinion. After all, the telepapers are full of polls, and they're all about the same. Did you see what the *Telenews* said this morning?"

"Haven't had time to look," said Thom. "I ducked my face into the electronic cupboard to get rid of my whiskers, and then I came right up here."

Deen tossed a zinc sheet at him. "Quote," he said.

"'Deen Wiggins, scion of the great family that established Omnipotent Service back in the twentieth century, has answered James G. Cavanaugh of the IMG in a startling manner. Last night—'nd so forth and so forth—" Deen went on. "But down at the bottom of the story is a paragraph that pleases me immensely: 'James G. Cavanaugh, president of the IMG, could not be reached for comment.' Will you pass the sugar, please?"

"What's your program for the rest of the day?"

"It's not my program—it's Omnipotent's program," Deen said quickly. "I wind up late tonight at a champagne party at Mrs. Psmith's. She's very influential in Washington, they tell me."

"She is."

"Publicity says the party will last until morning, and Promotion says I am then taking the monorail—the monorail, mind you—not my private jet—to New York. It's better psychology. I should get back to the New York office in time to watch the voting. . . ."

VII

AT FORTY-TWO HUNDRED Wednesday morning, sleepy, blurry-eyed, and still a little dizzy from Mrs. Psmith's champagne, Deen landed on Omnipotent's roof in a jetcab, took the elevator down to his office, and entered by his private door. Ghary Foster was there, and Deen greeted him with a cheerful smile. "Well, we are still the biggest and best organization in the world," he announced. "When some young upstart comes along and thinks he can whip Omnipotent, he'll think twice next time. Shall we have a shot of Old Plutonium on that?"

"Mr. Wiggins." Ghary Foster's hollow face was unusually somber. "Things are not going so well in Washington."

Deen spun on his heel. "What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Congress met at thirty-eight hundred," Ghary said dolefully, "and Senator Wickware has had the floor for the last two centichrons. Do you know what he is doing now?"

"No," Deen said coldly. "How could I know that?"

Ghary turned on the screen. Senator

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Wickware, a bald-headed, heavy-stomached man, seemed to be reading. Deen frowned as he sat down. "That's our service catalog," he said.

"You are so terribly right," Ghary said sadly. "The new one—the one we released Monday."

Wickware's voice came to them. "'It is well known," he read, "that it costs an average of forty-four thousand, nine hundred and six dollars for a middle-class man to rear a child to age eighteen. Omnipotent will guarantee to deliver to you a child of above-normal intelligence, physically healthy, emotionally sound, for twenty-eight thousand, nine hundred dollars. Your child will be without inhibitions, repressions or complexes—a perfectly integrated member of society.'"

Senator Wickware looked up over his glasses. "I pause to remind you," he said into the microphone before him, "that I am reading from the latest catalog published by Omnipotent Service—the company that today asks us to renew their franchise for another hundred years. I say this before I read what follows." He paused. The scene shifted to show the senate chamber, with all seats filled; the gallery, also filled; a battery of microphones and televising scanners on the rostrum, where now only the vice president sat quietly, for Wickware was speaking from the floor.

"I am acquainted," he said, "with the spectacular displays put on all over the nation Tuesday night by Omnipotent, and I am aware of the great quantities of mail that have been received by each of us, putting on the most terrible pressure that can be brought to bear—the pressure of public opinion." Wickware sighed heavily. Then he opened the catalog again. Deen frowned. Wickware began to read. "'Omnipotent has the solution. As soon as you are aware that you are going to be a father, we take over. The fertilized ovum is removed to a host-mother, carried under ideal conditions, and delivered to you at any stage you designate—immediately after birth, after weaning, after breaking, at school-age, at voting-age.'"

WICKWARE stopped. He pushed his glasses up on his forehead. "Ladies and gentlemen of the Senate," he thundered, "how do you like that? It is not enough that this great octopus of a service organization is taking away our right to be individuals, to make our own mistakes and to profit thereby." His voice rose. "Now," he shouted, "they are offering to make us a race of robots! They applied for a robot franchise in 2120, and this congress turned them down. Now they are doing it behind our backs. Has the Senate of the United States no longer the right to make the laws of this great nation?"

Shouts came from over the chamber. Deen sank slowly into his chair.

"What right does the common man have but the right to raise his own children in the way he sees fit? I insist, gentlemen, that if the common man chooses to make neurotics out of his children, it is his God-given right, and certainly not the right of a corporation!"

There was a voice, "Question!" The senators picked it up, and it began to grow into a chant, "Question! *Question!* QUESTION!"

Senator Wickware looked pleased. He wiped the perspiration from his bald head. "Lest there be any lingering doubt, fellow senators, let me remind you that this kind of set-up would make Omnipotent the sole judge of character. Their word would be the last word on repressions, inhibitions and complexes. When they delivered you your child at age eighteen, that child would be in their words, a perfectly integrated member of society. But who is the judge of what makes a perfectly integrated member of society? Are a few scientists at the head of Omnipotent to give the final verdict? Is Deen Wiggins to decide? Or shall we once again take this God-given opportunity to throw the destiny of the common man back into his own hands?" He pounded the desk with his fist until Deen almost shuddered. "I call for the vote, Mr. Vice-President, and I want to be on record as the first man to vote against renewal of the Omnipotent franchise!"

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Deen sat silently, lips pressed together. The scanner shifted to the big board on the Vice-President's platform. Up at the top on the left side a small milky-white plate glowed for an instant and showed the words: "Alexander, New Mexico." To the right of it appeared a red square as Alexander registered his vote.

Bradway of Kentucky also voted "no." The red squares formed a solid line down the first column. Along in the middle of the second column the voting halted for a moment. Hartley of Minnesota asked for the privilege of explaining his vote. "I am going to vote yes," he said, "in remembrance of the great service done by Omnipotent in the days when the earth's resources were dwindling and it did not look as if we would ever be able to replenish them." A small green square showed for the first time, but it didn't stop the red avalanche. Deen sat stunned while the vote rolled up.

The magenta light flashed. "Yes?" said Deen.

Thom Hughes' voice: "Are you watching, Deen?"

"I'm watching."

"It's all over," said Thom. "Is there anything you want?"

"Nothing."

"We built too big," said Thom. "Omnipotent destroyed itself." He sounded sad. "I'm going away for a vacation," he said, "if there's nothing I can do now."

Deen shook his head. The red squares were still coming up on the voting-board. "There's nothing," he said. He repeated it, "Nothing," and broke the connection.

GHARY seemed unusually solemn. Deen reached for the Old Plutonium. "At least," he said, "they didn't take this away from us." He poured two glasses. "Well, Ghary, what are your plans? You could retire, but you're a little young for that."

Ghary looked uneasy. He glanced at Deen and then away. He left the drink sitting on the desk. Finally he looked back at Deen. "To tell the truth," he said, "I've had a good offer from IMG."

Deen raised his eyebrows. "They work fast, don't they?"

"Yes, they do."

"We're losing," Deen said, watching the board like an automaton. "The greatest organization the world has ever seen is going up in smoke. When did they contact you?"

"Monday," Ghary said uncomfortably, "while you were in Washington. They offered jobs to everyone now working for any service company, with guaranteed priority if they join IMG within one week of the voting."

Deen took one last look at the voting-board and snapped off the screen. "They were sure then," he said. "But what happened Wednesday? Are they still proselyting?"

Ghary blushed a little. "I know how you feel, Deen, but after all, you can't blame the help. A man has to live. Yes, they were circulating cards Wednesday."

Deen was silent for a moment. Finally he said harshly, "Well, no hard feelings. It's a shock, that's all. I thought everything was going our way. Do me a favor, Ghary. Have a last drink with me."

"Certainly." Ghary seemed relieved. "To your future," he said.

Deen nodded slightly. "As you go out pass the word along that I am not averse to anyone's quitting whenever they feel like it."

"Some of the older employees will appreciate that, sir." Ghary shook hands and turned to leave, but he seemed reluctant to go. Deen saw why. When the door slid open, the big room outside of his office, that housed Accounting, was deserted. That, thought Deen, was ironically fitting; Accounting, the department that never produced, has been the first to desert. Deen closed his eyes for a moment until the door slid shut again. Then he sat there, slumped in the gravitic field. Omnipotent—two hundred and forty years old—in the Wiggins family for eight generations. Truly, truly it was the death of a giant.

He got up finally and stood for a mo-

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ment on the magnetic plate to get the wrinkles out of his cobalt suit. Then he stepped out into the short hallway. Miss Jonez was fixing up her face. She looked up guiltily and blushed. "Good luck, Miss Jonez," he said, and went on down to the great salesroom. It seemed to be deserted.

He shook his head slowly. He stood on the grass steps for the last time. Then with great deliberation he went down and walked across the room. It was strange how hollow his steps sounded, and how loud they were in the empty room. A cocoanut dropped and was swished in by a sweeping net. He started for the great glass doors, but drew back. The terrace was crowded with reporters and photographers, microphone men, and visual scanning equipment. He'd talk to them later—not today. Not now. There was nothing to say.

HE TURNED back and started up the stairway. He heard a cough and stared. A man was sitting at the restaurant counter, stirring a cup of coffee. Deen stared at him. The man reminded him of somebody. Deen looked for the platinum-blond waitress in the violet-

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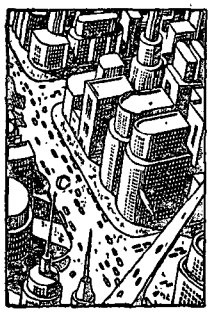

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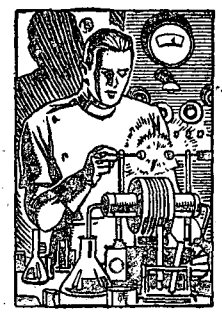

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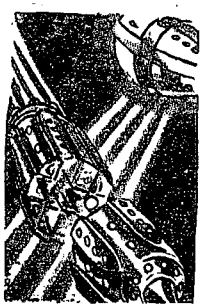

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colored uniform. She was gone. He looked back at the man.

"I'm Cavanaugh," the man said.

Deen frowned. Yes, it was Cavanaugh, the sedentary little man who had inquired about services last week. Deen looked at him again. Cavanaugh did not, somehow, look sedentary now. Deen said abruptly, "I asked you if you were any relation to James C. Cavanaugh, and you said no."

"I'm not," the man said. "I *am* Cavanaugh."

Deen digested that. Then he went behind the counter and got himself a cup of coffee.

"Sugar?" asked Cavanaugh.

"Two spoonsful," Deen said, and then caught himself. "Yes, if you please."

"I'm sorry for having deceived you the other day," said Cavanaugh, "but my intentions were good. You see, I grew up as a boy who rebelled against having everything done for him. That's how I got into the manufacturers. Then the other night, coming home from the moon on the *Velocity*, it occurred to me that I had never had any direct personal contact with the service companies because I had so violently opposed them. So—" he shrugged—"I decided to come here, where I could get first-hand authentic information." He watched Deen measure out two spoonsful of sugar. "You would have beaten us," he said, "if it hadn't been for that proxy-mother service."

Deen tasted the coffee.

"Too bad somebody has to lose." Cavanaugh got up. "I'll buy your stock at seventy-five per cent of par, to obtain your organization, building, and equipment. We can use Omnipotent."

"You can?" asked Deen.

"Yes, we can use you if you want to come with us. We anticipate an expansion of about five times in the next ten years."

"Thanks anyway," said Deen. "I'm going out to Colorado to see if it's too late to take a vacation that I've always been too busy to take."

"I thought," Cavanaugh said curiously, "that vacation-by-proxy was one of Omnipotent's major services."

"Omnipotent is dead," Deen said.

"Good luck," said Cavanaugh. "What about the stock?"

"See my lawyers," said Deen, "tomorrow." He got up and went heavily back to the stairway with its grass-covered steps; the grass needed cutting, he thought. He passed Miss Jonez's office. She had gone. He went into his own office and signaled for a pneumocab. . . .

He got off at the front door of the apartment. His step on the plate unlocked the door. The apartment smelled musty in spite of the air-conditioning. There was only a faint hint left of Karin's fragrance. He went to the bathroom and washed his face. That felt better. He went into the bedroom. The worst of it all was, with Omnipotent defunct, all its services were unavailable, and if he wanted to make up with Karin he'd have to do it himself.

The windows were open, of course, from the inside. He stared through them. The sky seemed strangely empty, as if some catastrophe had occurred. He took a step toward the window and then gasped. Omnipotent's great electric sign had been turned off!

He stood there for a moment, almost stunned. He took a deep breath. His eyes began to drop in a sort of embarrassment. He saw the red apples in the grove on the next roof, and started to press the lever that would close the windows to that awful emptiness of the sky. But he stopped abruptly at a strange sound.

At his side was Lydia, her claws rasping against the block of purple amethyst. She was no longer a pink-and-white ball of fluff. She was gaunt and shrunken; her beady eye was feverish. Her red-and-orange crest feathers tried to rise, but barely lifted from her neck. Her voice was a hoarse croak: "Good morning, sir. It's ten o'clock."

He stared at her. He looked out at the apples and back again at Lydia. "Ten o'clock," he acknowledged. Then he swung on her. "Damn it, Lydia, the world is growing away from you. Won't you ever learn to count time by chronos?"

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THE THREE

by GORDON R. DICKSON

WHEN the sun went down the Klantheid stirred, unfolding its "petals" until they spilled over the top of the tank in a tumbled mass of green and gold glory, and stretching its slim, fibrous body in the nutrient fluid in the tank. It had slept for a while, but not well, and it was impatient for the woman to come and feed it.

It extended the filaments at the base of its petals, searching the house for her presence. For the filaments were the Klantheid's perceptive organs. With them it saw, tasted, heard, felt and smelled—not as

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Of the three, only the plant could truly love. . . .

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humans do, but in a deeper, more intimate way for which the human language has no words. With them it could even talk, by complex vibrations of the filament tips together—in a sort of husky thrilling whisper. And it talked with the woman often; but with the man only when it had to.

The Klantheids were the dominant life form of Pelao, a small Arcturian planet completely devoid of anything but plant life—a garden planet, a meadow-world and a botanist's dream.

To protect Pelao Central Headquarters, the supreme authority of interstellar and interplanetary human civilization, had early set it aside as a government preserve. It was reserved for the botanists and for the research into new fields of organic medicine that grew out of its wealth of plant life and fertile soil. The Klantheids, in particular, were awarded the highest and most strict protection, for before the perambulating, sometimes vicious animal that was man they were helpless. But in late years, the regulations had been relaxed enough to allow the lonely outposts of gardeners and watchers to "fraternize"—that is, take an occasional Klantheid into a nutrient tank in their dwelling quarters and keep it there as a companion, friend or pet.

This, then, was one of those outposts. The man was a sort of gardener-watchman, a flower warden, responsible for several thousand square miles of the garden planet, and gone most of the time on the constant patrol that his job required during the ten-year term of his office. The woman was his wife, brought in to share his term of office with him by special permission. And the house was their home.

All this the Klantheid knew—not as humans know it, but in an odd, personal way. For the Klantheid had senses beyond humans' and the chiefest of these was the ability to respond to emotion.

This, indeed, was the source of its delicateness. There were other plants men had known, on Earth as well as on other planets, who could be hurt and die from slight changes of temperature, who died in the sun, or the sudden damp, or perished at the touch of a finger. The Klantheid was not like these. In its own way it was hardy—able if the need arose to go without food or fluid for a long time, and even to drag itself painfully by great effort from one place to another. Ironically, it was extremely sensitive to smoke; and for that reason cigarettes were *verboten* around it. But generally speaking it was a sturdy life-form, with the single exception of emotion.

IT WAS for this reason that it had not slept well—not this afternoon, nor many afternoons past. This was because the woman was unhappy, with a deep and buried sorrow, and the Klantheid suffered at the touch of her sorrow and did not know what to do about it. In its own way, the Klantheid was desperate, for sorrow, like hate and anger, could kill it, where it loved—and the Klantheid loved the woman, even as it feared and disliked—dislike was the strongest emotion it could summon—the man.

Slowly, these two conflicting emotions were tearing the Klantheid apart. Deeply and hurtingly, as it stirred in its tank and watched the blood-shot purple of the sunset on Pelao through the great curving window that backed its tank, it wished that its basic nature was different, that it did not have to love so deeply. It could ask to leave, and the law would compel them, the man and woman, to take it out into the open meadows again. But it could not bring itself to leave the woman. And it could not change its feelings toward the man. And that last was the hardest thing of all, for the Klantheid was not built to dislike, or indeed to do anything but love. Love was the deep-rooted instinct of its nature, the inner strength and meaning of its existence. Deeply, passionately, it longed to love, not merely the man and the woman, but all things, all humans, all life forms, all planets, all suns, all universes, all time and space. It knew, as humans will never know, the great thrilling sensation of being for one fleeting moment in touch, *en rapport,* with all life within its perceptive circle—that wonderful, ineffable sense of belonging that comes only from

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a great wave of love and appreciation of the beauty of all things washing out in all directions into the universe and touching response wherever it reaches. The Klantheid had had a few such moments in its life—moments when it felt in tune with all nature, and as far as that part of its existence went, it was satisfied, and ready to meet the rest of what its short dozen years of life might hand it. But it could no more ignore the sorrow around it now, than a human can ignore the killing cold of arctic snows.

Searching, searching, its filaments located the aura of the woman coming toward it. Her heart was breaking and the filaments of the Klantheid curled in agony as it sensed the emotion. In the surge of that reaction it lost what little appetite the last few weeks of trouble had left it. It waved away in protest, with its broad leaves of green and gold, the vitamins and minerals the woman was about to add to the fluid in which it rested.

"You are worried," it wept to her in the soft sussurance of its whispering filaments. "You are afraid, and you hurt. Let me sing to you."

"No," answered the woman, halfway between apathy and sad laughter. "My trouble's beyond singing. You know that."

"Let me tell you a story, then," begged the Klantheid. "A story of long meadows and soft skies and the bud hanging in the wind. A story of peace and contentment."

"No story," said the woman. She laughed a little harshly. "You don't happen to know of any rare old poisons growing wild around here, do you?"

The Klantheid's soft soul quivered in shock away from the emotion behind her words.

"Are you broken, broken, then?" it whispered weepingly, half to itself. "Are you all beautiful gone ugly wrong? Why? Why?"

"You'd know why, if somebody hated you and you learned to hate back," said the woman—but then her mood changed. She became contrite. "I'm sorry, pretty," she said tenderly. "Can't you just shut me out when I get to feeling like this, so I won't bother you?"

"Yes," whispered the Klantheid.

"Then why don't you?"

The Klantheid shivered.

"Shutting out is like dying," it said, "wrong. No. It is not possible for long. I cannot."

The woman shrugged helplessly. A little silence fell between them, plain Earth-woman and beautiful alien plant.

"He's coming back today," the woman said finally. "His tour is up for this month. He just called me on the visiphone."

The Klantheid shivered and said nothing. . . .

THE man came at midnight. In the brilliant light of Pelao's twin moons, his tiny flitter sank like a dying leaf to the green lawn surrounding the house; and he stepped out. He came in with instruments slung over his shoulder, scanner and official recording tape, and slung them on the coffee table in the living room, where they clattered and bounced.

"Any news?" he asked the woman.

She was standing by the great curved window and the tank of the Klantheid. She did not turn when he entered, nor when he spoke.

"No," she said.

"The bastards!" he said bitterly. The solid shock of his anger slapped at the Klantheid, making it cower, while its filaments whispered almost noiselessly in pain. "Do they want me to rot here?"

He glared at the interstel—the wireless communicator that connected with the huge sending station at the planet's pole—the sending station that was his only link with the head office on Arcturus 1, the Headquarters Planet of that Solar System. Two months before he'd applied for an emergency transfer from the service for the reason that he and his wife were incompatible and the psychological situation resultant produced inefficient management of his post. For two months no reply had come.

He turned to his wife.

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"Why don't *you* message them?" he asked. "Maybe they'll listen to you."

"What would I say?" she queried wearily.

"Tell them—" he checked himself, baffled. "Hell, tell them anything. Tell them you're sick. Tell them you're going to have a baby."

"And when they check?"

The man cursed, stalked across the room to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a drink. He flung himself into a low chair, broodingly.

"It's your fault," he muttered darkly, after a little while. "You ought to do something."

"My fault!"

The woman's voice was harsh with pain. In its tank the Klantheid whimpered, unnoticed.

"You were the one who was going to make this hell-hole a home—you said," he answered.

"What could I do?" she cried, almost wildly. "What was there to do with you gone twenty days out of thirty? What did you expect?"

The man shrugged his shoulders exasperatedly. He drank.

"I don't know," he said. "Forget it."

But the woman was wound up now.

"Forget it!" she said, furiously, turning on him. "Do you think I don't know what's wrong with you? Do you think I've sat here day after day for the past year and watched you come home month after month just as you are now, without knowing what your trouble is? You were never built to have a home and stay in it. Your life is twenty days steady on the job and then a quick run in the flitter to Pole City and an eight day binge. That's all you wanted before you met me on furlough back on Arcturus 1 and that's all you want now—isn't it?"

He did not answer, sitting frowning at his drink.

"I'm in your way here," she said. "You daren't run off to Pole City now that Headquarters knows you're supposed to be married. They'd declare you psychologically unfit and you'd never get another job with the Botany Service. I'm in your way, aren't I? *Aren't I?*"

He looked up, from his drink to her.

"Yes," he said, slowly, with bitter hatred, "you're in my way. You're breaking me. You're killing me and I'm sick of the very sight of you. Now go hide yourself someplace and leave me alone, damn you!"

The wave of cruel emotion slammed out from him, washing through the room, smothering, washing the Klantheid down through agony into unconsciousness.

WHEN the bruised tenderness of its psyche returned to awareness, the night was far gone, and the twin moons hung low in the sky. The woman had disappeared and the lights were out. In the low chair the man slept with drunken heaviness.

The Klantheid came back to life with a plan, a plan born of the pain it had just endured, and therefore, for it, a plan so monstrous and horrible as to be almost unbelievable. In its own way, the Klantheid had been driven somewhat insane. The man must be gotten rid of—at least for a long enough while for the woman to be healed and mended. It was impossible for the Klantheid to bring itself to hurt or damage another living creature—but there was another way.

Slowly, awkwardly, in the late moonlight, it began to drag itself over the side of the tank. It teetered for a moment on the edge and fell to the floor. There it rested for a second, then began slowly to pull itself toward the door leading to the lawn outside.

It moved by coiling and uncoiling its broad petals, the weak sucker ends of its roots trailing behind it over the polished floor. Gradually it struggled to the door whose automatic mechanism swung it open before the plant. It dropped one short step down from the sill and fell on the lawn.

Now progress was easier, for the grass of the lawn responded to the controlling will of the intelligent plant, stiffening up beneath it and lying down before it so that it half-rolled, half-slid, looking like some weird skater as it progressed away

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from the house it lived.

It approached the flitter.

Above, the entrance port of the flitter stood open in the moonlight. The Klantheid reached up with half its broad petals, hooked them over the sill of the port and, with what for it was a tremendous effort, lifted its own weight up and into the flitter. The effort involved was roughly analagous to that of a man chinning himself by two fingers—the little fingers of both hands. It tumbled at last onto the floor of the flitter, and while resting for a moment before proceeding any further, reviewed in its own mind what it must do.

From past experience it knew what the sunrise of the following day would bring. The woman would remain shut in her room. The man, barred from taking off for Pole City and sick with a hangover, would load the flitter with enough liquor to last him for a week and take off to visit one of the other, bachelor, Flower Wardens somewhere else on the planet. To get to another like himself would require an air trip of over a thousand miles, above the park-like planet where landmarks were few and every meadow looked like the next one.

The man would take off, set the automatic pilot and go back to his drinking, leaving to the wonderful mechanism of the airship that was the flitter, the job of bringing him safely to earth at his destination. If the automatic pilot failed him—

The Klantheid inched itself forward. It had been in the flitter only once; but that once had been when the man and woman had first picked it up to bring it to their house, on the occasion of the woman's arrival—and the man had explained the workings of the flitter to the woman as they flew. At the time the words had been meaningless, for the Klantheid had neither mechanical aptitude nor interest. But to a nature sensitive to the slightest whisper of a breeze or the nodding of a blossom, perfect recall was easy. Now it remembered and studied the memory.

The man had said that the automatic pilot was connected to the controls by a single jack plug, and had pointed it out beneath the instrument panel.

The Klantheid inched painfully forward, feeling, tasting, the cold metal all around it, vaguely sickened by it, as a human might be sickened by the taste of the metal of a fork from which the silver plating has been worn away. Memory led it to the jack plug. It closed its petals about it and pulled.

The jack did not stir. It was firmly socketed.

CRYING soundlessly inside itself, the Klantheid wrapped its petals more tightly around the plug, pushed with its tiny, weak roots against the resilient matting of the flitter floor and strained. The roots buckled and one petal tore, sending a spasm of pain through the plant body, but it held on, and suddenly, abruptly, the jack gave, and came sliding out.

The Klantheid collapsed, quivering, on the flitter floor.

For several minutes it lay there, gradually regaining its strength, its hopes brightening. The job was done and there was no harm to it. The man, with a hangover, and perhaps still drunk, would never think of checking the plug. He would set the course and leave the job of guiding the flitter to the automatic pilot. He would drink heavily and sleep again—and wake to find himself lost over the endless meadows and among the countless flowers. No harm would come to him—what harm could on a planet where there was nothing inimical—where the weather was always kind, and where food and drink could be had for the stretching out of a hand by those, who like the man, knew the flora of Pelao.

No harm would be done to the man, but he would be kept away from the station for a long time and in that time—so the Klantheid expressed it to itself—the woman should shed the blighted petal of her emotion toward him and grow a new one. Weary, but relieved, the Klantheid began its arduous trip back to its tank. . . .

Something had gone dreadfully wrong.

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The Klantheid cowered in its tank, trying to understand. Desperately, it went back in its mind, reviewing over and over again the incomprehensible train of actions that had brought tragedy upon the station. Futilely, its alien mind searched for the human thought processes and could not find them—and could not understand.

The day had begun as the Klantheid expected. The man had awakened with his hangover and stumbled around the station collecting his bottles and making ready for his trip. The woman had remained in her room—awake, for the Klantheid sensed her, but pretending sleep so that there would be no more cause for meeting the man before he left. The morning was half gone before the man finally had his gear, and was ready to climb into the flitter.

He came out of the station with the last load, staggering. He had drunk his way up out of his hangover and was continuing now to drink himself on down into unconsciousness again. On his final trip out through the living room, he turned, set down his armload of supplies, and, moving swiftly, but somewhat awkwardly, strode over and rapped on the closed door of the woman's room.

"What?" her voice came to the man and the Klantheid together, muffled by the door panels between them and the woman.

"Come on out here," said the man. "I'm not going to stand here and shout at you."

There was a short space of waiting and then the door opened and the woman came into the living room. Her face was drawn. She had not been s l e e p i n g through the long night and the Klantheid sensed the mind-numbing, wire-tense exhaustion that held her.

"What is it?" she said.

"I'm going to Rod Gielgud's station—number fifteen," the man said.

"Number fifteen," she repeated, automatically, tucking a stray wisp of hair behind her ear.

"If Headquarters calls about the transfer, or—" he hesitated, "anything, you tell them I just took the flitter out for a short trip to check on local watershed conditions. Then you call me at Rod's."

"Call you—" she echoed numbly.

THE man looked at her. For the first time the set, staring expression of her thin face seemed to reach through the self-concern that surrounded him and register on his mind. The tight lines of his heavy face, betraying the anger and frustration that lay just under the surface with him all the while, smoothed away for an instant in an expression of puzzlement followed by one of faint concern. He hesitated, looking at her keenly.

"Are you ill?" he demanded with sudden sharpness, pricked to harsh tones by the stirring of a long-buried conscience.

"No," she said dully—but then, as the sense of his words registered, the glaze went from her eyes and a little color crept back into her cheeks. She turned her head directly toward him and for the first time in months they looked openly at each other.

"Yes," she said.

"What's wrong with you?" the harshness was still there, but now his words were actually a question, not merely an indication of his annoyance.

"You know what's wrong with me," she said. "If you'd stay home—"

It was the wrong thing to say. He had begun to open up slightly, but he was not yet ready to have the blame laid squarely on his shoulders.

"Hell!" he said explosively and swung away. "I'm no mind reader."

And, blocking his emotions firmly to any more fair impulses, he grabbed up his last load from the table and went on out the front door. Woman and Klantheid, they watched him go, the possible moment of reconciliation lost and broken.

He climbed into the flitter, and took off. Like a silver bird it rose into the morning sunshine—rose to the height of a couple of hundred feet above the park-like lawn surrounding the station. Suddenly the woman broke. She ran across the room to the communicator and snapped it on to the flitter's wave length.

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"What is it?" his voice boomed into the living room from the wall loudspeaker.

"Harry!" she said. "Come back!"

"Why?" The tones of his voice, even filtered through the limitations of the loudspeaker, hinted at a struggle within him. What for? Why do you want me to come back?"

"I—" she stumbled and stopped, not knowing what to say to make him return. "Just come back and I'll tell you—"

There was a moment's silence, then his voice answered, automatically grumbling.

"All right. Just a minute while I put it back on manual—" He checked himself in mid-sentence. There was a moment when time hung still between the living room and the flitter suspended in the blue sky, and then the short silence was broken by a burst of insane fury from the loudspeaker.

"You—" he choked. "You dirty—," and the hate and resentment in him, spurred by fear came pouring out in a stream of foul denunciations and epithets directed at the woman—ending with, *"I'll kill you!"*

"Harry!" It was a desperate cry from the woman, pleading her lack of understanding.

"Try to get rid of me, will you?" he raved back. "Pull the auto pilot jack and maroon me, eh? What were you going to do—tell Headquarters I'd deserted? Stay where you are. I'm going to come get you and put you in the flitter and disconnect the manual and turn you loose—see how you like it when the automatic takes you out over the hills and cuts its motor and tries to land two thousand feet up in the air. Wait there. I'm coming to get you." And the flitter spun about and headed back toward the station in a vicious, shallow dive.

The whites of the woman's eyes flashed suddenly in abrupt shock and fear. Frantically, she spun about from the set, searching for some kind of refuge. But the station was wide open—neither latches nor locks held its doors and there was no place to go.

LIKE a wild bird beating its wings against the bars of a first cage, she fluttered wildly about the living room. Just as the flitter landed, her distraught eyes came to rest on the equipment cabinet set in one wall. Through its glass door she could see its contents, the medical kit, the communicator spare parts and a signal rocket handgun.

Desperately, she ran to the case, tore open the door and seized the handgun, turning to face the front door as the man came through.

He took two steps into the living room and halted, facing her, his mouth twisted, his shoulders hunched, hands at his sides. His breath came in short ugly gasps.

"Don't come any closer," she gasped. "I'll press the trigger button, Harry."

"Press and be damned," he muttered, taking another step. "You couldn't hit the side of a house."

He stepped forward.

"I mean it, Harry!" Her voice was shrill. His eyes were wild, insane.

"It's not safe with you here," he said, half talking to himself. "You'll be knifing me in my sleep, next. Or poisoning me."

He was almost on her now.

"I should have made you take the psychological test before we got married instead of letting you talk me into bribing the marriage bureau man into giving us good scores. Then I would have found out about you."

"That was your idea!" she protested—ending on a scream. *"Don't come any closer, Harry!"*

He paid no attention, talking as he sidled forward.

"You couldn't stand the loneliness," he said. "You cracked mentally. Your mind isn't strong like mine. I stand loneliness fine. Put the gun down, Cora—I'm not going to hurt you. Just put you some safe place where you can't hurt me." His eyes said that he lied.

"No," she sobbed, trembling now.

"Yes!" he shouted, suddenly leaping for her. She gave a loud cry as their two bodies came together. A blinding flash of red light filled the room, and the sound of an ear-splitting explosion. Then he

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was hurled back from her as if by the push of some monster hand, to crumple like a broken doll on the carpet and lie still, a red stain spreading from him, dyeing the carpet where he lay.

The Klantheid screamed, feeling the agony of the man's death.

She dropped the gun and sagged lifelessly to the floor.

FOR two hours now, the room had not changed. The dead man still lay, the woman alive but unmoving. The Klantheid whimpered, helpless in its tank and suffering all that the woman suffered, with all the added torture of not understanding.

As the sun rose to noon, however, it could stand no more. Weakly, tremblingly, it began to sing—not what it wanted to sing, a melody of soothing peace and the healing of hurts—but what it could not help but sing as long as the woman crouched near it, pouring out the tearing, agonizing waves of her emotion. As long as that possessed the room and it, it could sing only what it felt—of death and sorrow. And for a little the pressure went off a bit—the emotion now finding an outlet, flowing through the Klantheid and not damming up there, but turning, fabricating itself into a wire-thin whisper of melodic sound, sweet and bitter.

The sound went out and cried through the room, growing in strength as the Klantheid began to relieve itself of the excess of killing emotion its tender nature had never been created to carry. The song sobbed and wept over the dead man, sorrowed over the woman and looked beyond and beyond into tragedy and sorrow everlasting.

The sun passed its zenith. Gradually, as the song went on, the woman began to stir. Like a somnambulist hypnotized by the music, she raised her head to look at the Klantheid. And, after a while, she got to her feet. The Klantheid watched her, aching for her and wanting to sing her comfort, but unable to do anything but echo the emotion that she herself was putting out—that was feeding on the very music it sang, and growing, and which possessed the plant. Into her soul it sensed, and sang a great, great longing for peace, utter and final peace—and the Klantheid cheered up as this new note crept into its music, for it thought that the woman was feeling better at last.

So it threw its whole self into its singing and sang of peace. And the woman turned away from it and walked over to the equipment chest and took from the medical kit a hypodermic filled with a strange brown liquid, which she injected into the big blue vein inside her right elbow. And while the Klantheid still watched and sang hopefully, she sat down in one of the big chairs and died.

With her dying, present peace came to the Klantheid, for it was not human, and to it death was the final solution and end to all things. As far as its own sensitive feelings were concerned, the man, and later the woman, disappeared when they ceased to think and feel. It only retained a memory of the woman and the beauty it had sensed buried deep in her and a remembrance of having loved her. The plant felt a great emptiness within it and a need for healing.

So, slowly, tiredly and laboriously, it climbed over the edge of its tank and down onto the floor. Weakly, it dragged itself across the threshold and out into the soft light of afternoon, into the warm light, into the bright light.

Before it the meadows fell away unendingly under the afternoon sky, and the grass, pushing and relaxing beneath it, helped it along as it moved slowly away from the station, leaving it behind. The bright light warmed it and the air was heavy with the constant whisper of living, growing things that the Klantheid could hear and feel deep within it. As it traveled, gradually its tense, rolled-up petals unfolded and spread themselves to the sun; its filaments rose and swayed in the breeze and the gentle motion of its travel. On every side the outspreading wash of its appreciation and affection was returned a thousandfold. Happy, the Klantheid vibrated its filaments together and sang a paean rejoicing in the end of all unhappiness and sorrow.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

light, but in consequence turn time backwards.

Thus we achieve travel into the past by no more complicated machinery than acceleration.

All this has a practical application to space travel. Take a hypothetical ship and crew heading for distant ports on far planets. If the ship can push its hulk very close to the speed of light—say 98%—its elapsed traveling time will be cut to one-fifth normal time. A journey of fifty years will take only ten. Quoting a German rocket expert, a Dr. Sanger, Mr. Clarke mentions an even more extreme case: a ship circumnavigating the entire cosmos—a distance of ten billion light years! If the ship presses very close to the speed of light, just a few decimals below it, the crew will see only thirty-three years pass, while back on earth 10,000,000,000 years will have passed!

The complications here are staggering. How would you like to be gone thirty years and come home to a world ten billion years older? What kind of planet, what kind of civilization would you find? And where would you get crews to volunteer for flights with this end hanging over their heads—that their families and the world they knew would be so long gone that not even a memory would remain by the time they got back?

There are other issues here which are something hard to take. Will the aging process of the human body be slowed down in proportion to the slowdown in time? Will this crew actually age only 33 years while 10,000,000,000 normal years troop by? If, as earlier suggested, the limiting speed of light is exceeded and time therefore made to reverse itself, will the crew grow younger? By what alchemy will old bones and muscles be restored to youth, will full-grown bodies shrink to boyish ones?

Theoretical excursions back and forth in time are all very well, but will our bodies follow the wonderful equations? Will our inexorable metabolisms keep pace with the tick of the changing clocks? We may yet find out.

ETHERGRAMS

OGLY-BONE QUALITY

by Douglas Graves

Dear Mr. Mines: Hey, what goes with the Standard group? Is quality rearing its ogly head-bone?

Long time now, the gruesome threesome have been something I bought only when I was hard up for reading matter. *Real* hard up. I liked science-fiction but not *that* much....

Once in a while I would buy a copy of one or the other but I'd wind up so bored and disgusted that I would vow not to buy another copy again. Until next time.

And then, three weeks or so ago, I decided to look into this business of fan-magazines. 'Course the magazines I usually buy don't run any letters from readers unless at least a Ph. D. (at least)—much less, they don't run revues on fmz. The thought should drop dead...

So I ankles down to the drug store and buys a copy of SS, after looking through the rest of the selection. It had the most titles of fan publications listed.

Sent for a slew of f-mags. (How long has this been going on? Laugh? I thought I'd OOH-HAW-HAW-HAW!!) About 22:30, I idly peeked at the lead story in SS.

About 2:30 I finished it and had a hell of a time getting up next morning. This is the G. O. Smith of olden days, of Venus Quadratic or whatever you call it. Mighty good.

Liked the cover of the February TWS so much I bought that too. This is as good as Bonestell. Maybe better than some. De Camp's story was highly enjoyable. I'm warning you, Sam, next thing you know, you'll be getting a lot of the 35¢ trade. Circulation will go up like a WAC Corporal.

You'll make that $100,000 a year that John Magnus speaks of. Think of the taxes!

Seriously, if you turn out such good issues consistently, you will sell one copy you seldom sold before.

Mine, Mines.—*Milwaukee Avenue, West; Fort Atkinson, Wis.*

P.S. Revolting question: "Who wants pix of men with plunging necklines?" Shoutingly:

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"Not I!!!" How repulsive can you get?

Why is everybody so surprised when they pick up a copy of SS or TWS and find it's good? Just because we've been saying it was? Has the technique of the Big Lie made super-skeptics out of everyone? Personally we were classmates of G. Washington (drank coffee with him) and couldn't tell a lie if we wanted to. A hundred thousand a year? You trying to commercialize our viewpoint?

EMBITTERED FALSIE

by Offuli Saari

Dear Sam Mines: Ive been a little impatient with several pulp outfits, and their inane arguments about pornographic illustrations. In some cases, we shd have to grant the illustrations are illustrations. Before I get to them, let me thank you for some good stories I've found in the last year or so. "Better" seems gratuitous in one direction or another, I'll not specify, hardly a good title. And while I 'approve' of adolescence for those who are forced to go through it, I can't see the good of pasting names at the head of letters, where a small part of the readers indulge in coyness, cuteness, whimsicality and strutting. Assuming that stories occasionally need and get editing, many prolix letters call for treatment after the act, as they don't get much thinking ahead. Crossen's point is deserving: the small percent who make noise, mostly exploiting themselves, and the large majority who support the publishers and writers.

But this is what has made the impatience, mostly with other magazines, the flood of "stiff" publications. One of your recent correspondents wondered if STF means "stuff". Apt enough, perhaps. The writers, editors and illustrators pander to immature emotions. The panders react to criticism self-righteously, and are so dishonest and perverted (for money) they miss the point about sex in words and pictures. Sex is always with us, indeed, but only needs clear interest and frank and ready attention, without snide representations to worry the young, or without false accents to conceal the lack of a story—much as acting in a movie is replaced by gestures with some cigarette business, etc. Adults set enough bad examples, without pulp sexiness leading youth to suppose it's all that way in the Great Beyond.

Now, what I'd favor is *real* writing about sex, not as titillation to support empty or unfulfilled lives but as mature (alas censorable) consideration: the communication of beauty and dignity, communication as celebration of our worth. Who has mentioned love in the frequent letters and editorials about magazine covers, etc? What is it we use to "confer a sense of worth" on one another? "Science fiction," in the 'hands' of pustules at desk, typer, easel!—*E. Brooks, 1633 N. Grant Ave., Springfield, Mo.*

We feel Offuli Saari for you ourselves, as we do for any lil swamp critter weaned on persimmons. But through all that tampering with the language, we have a hunch you are on the side of the angels after all and that we might find much to applaud in what you say. If sex—and other facts of life—are always with us, orchids to the writers who can make it appear an honest and natural part of life, without false accents, with a communication of beauty and —did you say dignity? Sex? I doubt it, but let's say important, h'm? Suspect some steady readers are going to call on you for a sequel to explain a lot of what you said.

TO THE ILLOGICAL END

by Richard N. Phillips

Dear Mr. Mines: It must be a terrible jolt to the pride of a writer of detective stories to discover that he must learn something new in order to break into the science fiction field.

I refer to the guest editor Kendell Foster Crossen in the February issue of Startling.

This guy reminds me of the hot-shot high school graduate (See my diploma!) who gets his first job as a mail clerk in a large firm. Nothing suits him—the name of the company, his product, his firm—all are not quite good enough for him.

Presently the lad finds himself back on the outside looking for another job because his boss and fellow employees didn't appreciate his terrific gifts of talent, his wonderful words of wisdom.

"Throw the science out of science fiction." Splendid! Let's remake the cover of our favorite mag, too! Let's cross out the byline *Today's Science Fiction—Tomorrow's Fact.* Let's call our magazine *Commonplace Stories.*

And while we're at it, let's cut out those old fuddy-duddies George O. Smith, Fletcher Pratt, and Isaac Asimov. Nobody but fans reads them anymore.

We'll be forced to change the contents, too. We'll have only detective stories; but we'll eliminate all mention of crime. After all this theme is a little hackneyed, don't you think? That way we'll have more "room for characterization, for ideas, for atmosphere—for all those things which can strike a responsive chord in the readers' hopes and desires." Readers who are interested in crime can read the newspapers or go talk to the cop on the

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beat. We'll have more room for messages this way.

I'm sick of trying to please the reader, too. Let's give him information, by all means, in big doses whether he likes it or not. We'll just pour it down his throat like castor oil.

Mr. Crossen's final suggestion is terrific: "If they (the writers of science fiction) meet the challenge even halfway, then science fiction and literature, will become rich in the names of authors who have spoken for the public conscience. . . ."

Pray tell us, do we want names of authors or do we want good stories?

Please, Mr. Editor, (I tremble in my shoes lest I be labeled a *fan* of your magazine) I have every issue of your wonderful magazine. I prize these issues, every one. Don't let me or my wife and two children wonder whatever became of that marvelous magazine *Startling Stories.—222 East 7th St., Mishawaka, Ind.*

Don't look now, but we suspect a trace of satire in the above. We also suspect that Mr. KFC is right now chuckling in his well-trimmed beard. But don't go getting that mushroom-shaped cloud over your head, Mr. Phillips. Ken undoubtedly bore down a little. What he was saying however, was something you might not disagree with so strongly as you think. He was saying a *story* is more important than a wiring diagram. And applying that thumb-rule to the stories you have liked best, how do you come out?

POST-CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: So at last the Day of the Trimmed Edges has arrived! 7½ cheers for the Feb. ish of SS! In honor of the occasion I give you a poem:

Once said an editor daring:
"These edges really need paring.
I'll cut 'em off straight,
And see how they rate."
Now see how his mags are faring!

Now you may counter with one of yours and we'll be even.

TROUBLED STAR—long live the space opera! If they were all as good as this no one would mind *how* many you printed. Said category is badly crowded with uninteresting stories but this one, luckily, stands above them.

The rest of the stories were fair, no complaints. Have you ever thought about listing the number of words after the story title on the contents page? You count them anyway, don't you, Sam? You don't just weigh the papers like an old English prof. I once had, do you?

Mr. Crossen's editorial was good. Are you planning more like it? It would save you a lot of wear and tear, Sam—not that yours aren't good, too. (You know I didn't mean *that!)*

Please, please do *not* have anymore Major Venture. I had to air the place out for a week after reading it. It was so lousy I still remember it after all this time! (Not that I don't remember the outstanding good ones, too!) If Bill Deppe of No. Carolina wants more Major Venture I suggest he write it himself. It just couldn't turn out as bad as the original!

I have around 200 back ishs of various stf mags and pocketbooks for sale or trade, 1940 to date. If anyone is interested please let me hear from you immediately if not sooner. About the time this mag hits the stands we'll be moving and it would take a truck to haul the full collection!

One more li'l suggestion, Sam, and then I'll go away. Instead of using that nice large back cover for advertising the handy little Spot Reducer, etc., how about some art work, astronomy photographs and facts, or just a nice large pic of yourself, suitable for framing? (Of course). Seems a shame to let it go to waste, and, as you well know, there are some of your competitors who *do* use the back covers to good advantage!

And with that happy thought I'll leave you alone for another month.—*385 North 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

From a fan named Carol came hints by the barrel:
"Please let us hack from the cover in back
The Spot Remover ad—it makes me mad."
Quoth Carol.

"This spot so dandy would be most handy
For art work of stars, or Venus or Mars,
Or a portrait in red of ye veritable ed,"
Quoth Carol.

O, flatterer fair, this charitable air
Would be gashed quite asunder by so mad a blunder!
For who would buy—a portrait of I?
Quoth ye ed.

That ought to hold her. At least I say so every time I am forced to the bitter extremity of doggerel in self-defense.

AND SO TO BED

by Kelvin L. Kennedy

Dear Sammy: Trimmed edges? *TRIMMED EDGES!!!!!!!* Oh, Boy! I could hardly

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believe my space-shot eyes, but there it was—big as life. (Small "l" or big "L"—there's a pun there someplace but this is no time for a scavenger hunt.) SS looked so much better than the other pulps that it was, well—just plain startling!!

Immediately I grabbed a copy and stood transfixed staring starry-eyed at the striking transformation. Then I closed my eyes and started to coo softly as I ran my fingers delicately along the smooth, even edges. Stumbling over to the counter in a blissful fog, a thought struck me—like a bolt of warped space out of the Nebulosity in Pleiades. I quickly glanced at the cover—nope, still two bits! Plunking the quarter down, I ran all the way home sobbing to myself, "Startling's got Trimmed Edges!!!"

Seriously, all jokes aside, (move over Mr. Mines) it was wonderful to see you've evened the edges to match the superb cover design and quality stories making SS a real top notch mag all round. Only thing left is to go digest size.

Until then, when I promise to write again, I remain Startlingly yours.—*328 No. State, Ukiah, Calif.*

Your all agree comment is superfluous?

THE LAST STAGES
by Daryl Sharp

Mines dear Sam: (Thank Hank, he started it!) Listen to my tale of woe. Since I was introduced to SF a few years ago, I have become a hopeless, incurable addict, plotting diabolically (and successfully) to ensnare unsuspecting and innocent friends into your perverse pages of iniquity. Noted doctors and physicians have given me only sixty more years to live. My school work has fared deplorably to the state where I am now among the chosen few at the head of the class. Yes, Sam, my days are numbered and I am doomed to a life of degeneracy, for which I am thankful to YOU, not H. Browne, not W. Hamling, not R. Palmer, but to YOU, Samuel Mines!

You see, until I met you in the pages of SS, FSM, TWS and (recently) SPS, I was merely a part-time reader, my brain was clear and I lived in ignorant bliss. And then, Wop! Fizzle! Berbleslap! Pftsloom! You hit me. Never have I received a blow so craftily delivered and so willingly accepted.

My bloodshot eyes bear witness to the effect of your editorials. My withered and emancipated limbs testify to the many sleepless hours spent crouched over your nefarious letter columns. But I will have the last laugh yet, for I have nearly acquired the three dollars necessary for a subscription after scrounging pennies for months, doing without my favorite bubble gum, limiting myself to one stick of licorice a week, etc.

At night I prowl the empty streets, looking for a thin dime some poor (ha!) soul might have dropped unwittingly, or a rare 3-legged BEM I could sell to the British Museum.

Doubtless your heart cries out to me in sympathy and understanding, but I have no need of your pity, because I'm glad! Glad, do you hear? I'm glad! Heeaaahhh!

Luckily I have reached the end of my epistle, for I faintly detect the stealthy footsteps of my attendant approaching. He must not find this letter, for if you receive it you will know that your efforts have not been in vain! He's coming in! No, don't take it! What? You're a fan too? And you'll mail it for me? Well, great babbling BEMS!—*R.C.A.F. Station, Greenwood, N. S., Canada.*

We've always wanted to meet a babbling BEM. Alas, poor Daryl. We knew him when his mind was clear and sharp, when he flunked every course and was kept every afternoon after school. His teacher looked like Marilyn Monroe, he was no dope. Chin up, stout fella, and all that sort of thing—it can't last forever.

THAT MYOPIC LOOK
by Jack Moskowitz

Dear Mr. Mines: With the February issue of SS I am excluding your magazine from my list of "SS magazine musts", and place it on my other list of musts; "Must I buy this magazine?" (No.)

Up to the February SS, I have *bought and read* every issue for over a year. The February issue is bought, but will remain unread due to the smaller TYPEFACE inaugurated with the trimmed edges format. Being afflicted with a condition of the eyes known as nearsightedness, I make it a point to buy a magazine which not only has good stories, but is also easy to read. Your magazine SS *had* both.

WSA has trimmed edges, but maintains the same readable type. The fancying up of the magazine has had peculiar effects on the cover. It's a little out of shape. By trimming the edges you have forgotten to change the cover to fit the new proportions of the magazine.

Well, all I can say is "keep up the good work," and remember, everyone makes mistakes. Here is hoping you profit from yours. (I doubt it very much.)—*177 Shephard Avenue, Newark 8, New Jersey.*

P.S. Trim the edges just a little more and compete with the digest-size magazine. I will continue to read TWS, and FSM, unless they change for the worse like SS.

Your eyes may really be bad, Jack. The type in the new SS is exactly the same size—although in a better looking type design.

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So what more can we say? Would you like it *bigger*?

DENUNCIATORY PHRASES
by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: I wasn't going to write a letter to you about the February SS, because it was so bad I was afraid you would break down and weep when my letter showed up with the same kind of evil phrases and denunciatory sentences that I felt would issue forth from all your other readers. But . . . the more I thought of that horrible thing you printed in place of a novel, the more I felt that you should be given the crowning blow.

George O. Smith ought to be shot, fried, drawn and quartered, boiled in oil, and generally dressed down for writing that . . . that . . . TROUBLED STAR. And you, Sam, you of all people bought it and let it appear. I am truly aghast. I still feel it must have been a ghastly mistake. Heh. The basic premise was very good, the characters were even fairly credible . . . but the pacing of the story was hit and miss, the plotting was likewise, the characterization was incredible, and that ending . . . that ending . . . was beyond belief. It was something out of a comic book. Or even a television screen. How much do you think we will swallow, Sam?

The issue did have an excellent cover. And the other stories were very good. But, oh that stinking thing in front. . . .

Oh, yes . . . thanks for the trimmed edges. After all these years of yapping, we finally got 'em. Mind telling us why all of a sudden we get trimmed edges now?—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon.*

This is known as the negative approach. Our usually ebullient Geis is not geysering this trip. For the positive approach, see the next letter—and in view of the reference to Geis and TROUBLED STAR, will George be surprised when he sees it!

BACK IN BUSINESS
by George Viksnins

Dear Sam: You did it again! You came through this month with a story that is even better than the lead story of the best magazine on the market—SpS. TROUBLED STAR by good old G. O. was an excellent space-opera yarn. It was even better than Brackett's THE BIG JUMP in SpS. By now, probably, your desk is overflowing with letters from readers condemning it as d——d space-opera. I say—so what that it's space-opera? Space-opera is my favorite form of stf and I know it is also the favorite form of stf for many others of your readers. So, keep space-opera coming to us in both; SS and SpS.

Now, as to the rest of the thing. First, the cover. I don't put much stock in those half-visible things. If the rocket was solid and the gal wasn't there it would have been the best thing you ever used for a cover, but anyhow the blue-red contrast was pleasing to the eye and the cover was well done even if I don't like Emsh.

The stories, aside from TROUBLED STAR were nothing to rave about, but they were up to your usual and that's also good. I didn't like Farmer's poem. It would've been much better if it rhymed.

I don't agree with Crossen, in fact, I'm cross at him. This guy has the nerve to say that us fen are 5% of the readers of stf. Hardly. First, his figures are no doubt wrong and, second, most of the readers gradually become fen.

Now to the letters.

Madam White: Maybe you don't have anything else to do except reading SS, but most of the other people (?) who read SS do. Otherwise, a nice letter.

Bill Deppe: Yeah, Sam, how about the promised CF mag?

Arda Kauer/Kaner: A very nice letter for one written 4:00 o'clock A.M. Ray, not Kay Thompson: Wanted, 5 lbs. of egoboo.

C. McKinney: I agree, let's send more mags abroad and popularize stf outside United States.

John Brunner: Nice letter.

Hank (CF forever) Moscowitz: Write soon.

Chas. F. Wells: Fooey on you, not N3F.

Mildred Moore: What's the matter? Don't you like men?

Maurice Lemus: What do you mean 16? I'm 2 myself and look at this letter. (Nothing much to see, it isn't printed.)

Rory Faulkner: Nice letter.

Marian Cox: I guess it's a hobby of yours to talk about the spelling of your first name.

Barbara Ann Goldblatt: The 534678256946th teenage fan club was just founded—The Protozoas. Care to join? The dues are only $10,000 a month. 1 member.

Poul Anderson: How about writing a story for SS?

George A. Kelley: If you are a teenager, call me up—GR 3-6103. A fellow Philadelphian. See you at the con.

Mrs. Ames: WHAT? No CF? Are thou in full mind? For shame.

Gregg Calkins: Oopsla & SCIENCE fiction forever.

Martin Graetz: Another Graetz???

Richard Geis: A very timely letter. Ties right in with TROUBLED STAR.

Miss Marsh: No fan clubs in Atlantic City, but one in Philly—PSFS. Write to Dave Hammond if you want to join.

Deretchin: Variants forever.

Rich Gross: Another teenage fan club? Gasp. Hic . . . I give up.

Bob Kessler: NC.

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Dick Clarkson: Snalligasters forever!
Nicholson: I wish I could go.
I know this is already too long. Goombye.—*4152 Parkside Avenue, Philadelphia 4, Pennsylvania.*

We've got a few million more letters appaluding TROUBLED STAR—for most readers definitely seem to enjoy space opera—but who wants to print raves? In fact, we received so much mail this month that printing only a small fraction of it involves terrible decisions—you remember that moron joke? —and thousands of irate customers will have to sharpen their typewriters and try, try again. So, to continue:

THE HUMAN ELEMENT
by Juanita Wellons

Dear Sam: Aren't you sweet? I was wondering if the promised cut in pages was going to include a cut in the cover size too . . . and here it is. . . . NOW, how about another Coggins cover? THIS time I can put it in the magazine rack without having it fringed on three sides.

Now, look . . . you mustn't (getting so I spell like him, too . . . WHO, you ask? Waidaminit, I'm coming to that) take that Mittelbuscher guy to heart. . . . I gallop thru the Feb. SS . . . an WHAT!!! No ORBANS??? Schomburg's dandy; AND Finlay; Emsh? . . . well maybe . . . but PLEASE don't neglect Orban. . . . (Siddown, Paul, I tol' you I was gonna tell Sam . . . you and your Schomburg (pardon-SchRomburg) machines . . . faa.)

While I'm on the subject of what I want, Sam, ignoring of course the fact that I'm outvoted by . . . what is your circulation, anyway? If Eric Frank Russell should just happen to send you something. . . . Sam, if you turn that down . . . I'll donate all my SS's to the Salvation Army. . . . (All right, so they won't accept them . . . is it my fault you publish things like THE LOVERS???) Oh, yes, more Crossen . . . (and there are some rather nasty calculations floating around on that Manning Draco baby. . . .)

Speaking of Crossen, that was a nice li'l guest editorial this ish . . . sad but true . . . (I got in too late for the days when rockets were good copy, and much as I love that sort of thing, I guess I have to admit the human element has got to come in. . . .) And that was a terrific editorial on the Convention (or was that in TWS. . . . That's what you get for editing two magazines . . .) felt like I was back there again . . . of course, bein' under 21 I had no experience with the alcoholic angle (Sam! Don't look at me like that!!! HONEST!!! I DIDN'T!) But that description of the banquet was perfect, a little too gentle and polite perhaps, but my sentiments somewhat exactly. You look good on a panel, too . . . (not WALL, GUEST . . . EDITORS . . . you know) but don't be so all-fired entertaining . . . some of us NEED educating.—*224 S. College, Muncie, Indiana.*

Where were you at the convention?

Honest—you liked the Crossen editorial? Well, there had to be *someone* who did. Acted just like adrenalin on the fans. Which is probably good for them.

GRIPE CORNER
by Barbara Behrman

Dear Mr. Mines: You don't know me, Mr. Mines—you've never even heard of me before—but you had a hand in making me do something I thought I'd never do—write to an STF editor.

Often, I've flipped through the letter section of a brand-new SF zine, read the letters (but usually only when desperate for something to read), and come to the conclusion that never—but *never!* would I become involved with the pack of snarling, snapping, swaggering, and sometimes sniveling "Fen" who carouse drunkenly through four or five pages, busily starting fights, finishing fights, calling each other names, boasting what wonderful writers they really are, fellas, and in general turning out what they consider witty and intelligent material which will make said editor sit up and take notice of the un-touched genius awaiting his call. Take my word for it, sir—it's "touched" alright!

Then what, you may well ask, am I doing sending in this highly mis-spelled and grubby little letter, if I consider myself such a lily among the thorns—or was it weeds? The explanation is simply this. Outside of two guys I write to, I know no one who reads STF (other than myself.) I complain to them all the time, and they are very kind and understanding about my child-like ignorance and bitterness—but I felt that if I just told one editor how I felt, I would no longer feel so bitter toward fandom in general. Because of your Feb. TWS letter column, you are elected.

I'm a fairly normal eighteen-year-old girl, with at least the IQ of a fairly normal fourteen-year-old girl, and a personality that is somewhat better than Medusa's. While I enjoy school (to a limited extent!) and a social life, I also like radio, TV, and reading. In reading, I like, once in a while, to pick up an STF magazine—especially like now when I've just finished the Betsy MacDonald *Anybody Can Do Anything* which I just borrowed from the school library, and it's vacation and I have some time on my hands with nothing to read. I like to read, and will read anything—from Steinbeck to H. Allen Smith—and

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love it all! I read SF occasionally—as I enjoy a light wine with a good dinner occasionally. But I certainly have no intention of making a career of the darn stuff, like so many of the fen do. I have no interest in attending hundreds of conventions, joining hundreds of clubs, or writing hundreds of silly letters. (One silly letter is enough!) So what does that make me? Don't answer. And would you like to know what absolutely nauseates me? Well I'm telling you anyway—it's those letters by twelve, thirteen, and fourteen-year-olds who talk about Bems, Ghus, and larger and nuder females as did Tom Piper. Why would you print such a letter from a child that age! The ultimate in bad taste all around, I'd say.

Something else that causes much hair-tearing around here is the "I-can't-spell-isn't-that-a-scream-just-call-me-STF's-Milton-Berle" type letters. I can't spell either, but that's just because I'm dumb and absent-minded, and NOT on purpose. The only thing that makes me feel better about the whole thing is knowing that someday (maybe!) some of these guys will look back through the "zines" and read their letters, and blush with shame at the utter pompousness, the conceit, and the sophomoric "humor" there contained. I doubt it though, on thinking it over.

About this time, Mr. Mines, if you are still with me, you are probably thinking what a bitter, nasty-tempered little brat I am, and how do I get off knocking all your other little friends, and if I don't like SF, why don't I go bother some other type of editor? I know just how you feel, but believe me, I am not all bad. (Just mis-guided.) There *are* some intelligent letters—Paul Mittlebuscher, for instance, (who happens to be one of the guys I write to and is plenty smarter than I) and Zillah Kendall who agrees with me (or do I agree with her?) only she says it better-naturedly. And I am grateful to SF for two things—some of the people I've met—and several moving and memorable stories that I will never forget, like "The House of Many Worlds", "The Dawn of Flame" and the one that went with it whose title escapes me for the moment, and a novel called "Excaliber and the Atom"—among others. For these pearls I am thankful, so I try to forget about the oyster shells that take up so much room and time.

I haven't read anything but the letters yet, in the Feb. issue—I hope, to put it bluntly, that it's worth the money, and that I wouldn't have been wiser to buy Planet instead. But that's the risk you take.

I have written quite enough—too much, maybe, so this is absolutely it! I don't expect that you'll print this—it's too long and too—well, too bitter, for the most part. But that's alright. I don't care one way or another. I know that if you do print it, I will be told to shut up about a thousand times, however. But this wasn't meant as much for the fen as it was for you personally—because I like your answers to the letters, and because you sound like a regular guy, and because you've heard, I guess, from just about everyone else in fandom. (My most hated words—fandom, fen, ish, zine, Bem, and Ghu). So I hope you are reading it and that your secretary is not relegating it to the wastebasket. Not that I expect you to change anything for me. I don't. I know better than that. Just please try to keep on (or begin) giving us more memorable and really good stories, and more intelligent letters.

Or aren't there any?—*865 Boulevard, Westfield, N. J.*

P.S. Please forgive me if I sound too belligerant—I really am a peace-loving gal, and some people actually *like* me!

B. B.

This is one fight we are going to sit back and enjoy. Usually the rocks are aimed at us and we are too busy ducking to get any pleasure out of the proposition. But to see the fans on the receiving end for a change—ah, millenium. Barbara, you're only eighteen and a growing girl. Do you realize what you're doing, taking on this whole mob? Barbara—they don't fight *fair;* they'll pull a Martian grulzak on you when you're not looking . . . Better stand by for indoctrination. A word before you go. You ask why I print certain letters which apparently baffle you. It's my perverted sense of humor, no doubt. I print them because I think they're funny. Stop shaking your head—it might come off.

SNAFU AND FUBAR

by John L. Magnus Jr.

Ye gawds, Sam: Here I'm so proud of you about the February SS that I could kiss you, and you (gah!) have to go and fubar the whole beautiful mess by printing Crossen's thing.

Obviously Ken thinks he has a new idea. Ho, some fanzines he should read. That's fandom itself. Half the time we rage about why there should be more SCIENCE fiction, and the other half we squeal that THE STORY's the thing. I mean, what the heck—that's what fandom's for, isn't it?

"Throw the science out of science fiction." Sam, so help me, that's exactly what he said. YOU printed it. Now really, Sam. All right, go ahead, take the *science* out of *science* fiction. What have you got left? Fiction. Just that . . . fiction.

Oh, what's that you said, Sam? Oh, you say, "But the setting of the story is on a rocket ship to Aldeberan." Yeah, on a rocket

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ship to Aldeberan. That makes it science fiction. What Ken means is that he wants to make Out of This World Adventures ultra-popular, huh? Just as long as the setting is out of this world, and therefore futuristic, it'll sell. Seems to me a mag by that same title given one sentence ago folded in a very short time.

Well, don't forget what made science fiction. It was that it had something extra, an added challenge that *dared* its readers. Dared them to believe, and look forward . . . and hope. . . . and build. I never favored the term *science fiction* myself, it always seeming to me that something like *progressive* fiction or concept fiction was more fitting, if not so alliterative.

Ken also says that Ray Bradbury is the best science fiction writer of today. Well, as far as I'm concerned, he's one of the best *writers* of today. But he writes fantasy and poetry, not science fiction. Let's face it.

He wants science fiction to replace the detective story and the love story. Does he forget that the *good* science fiction yarn may be a detective story or a love story? But it has that something extra which appeals to our special group all of the time, and everyone sometime. For it to appeal to all of the people all of the time doesn't require the elimination of the one thing that keeps it from appealing so . . . for then you wouldn't have left any of what you were trying to get to appeal.

It requires the change of mind of the people, the masses you are attempting to appeal to. And it is happening.

It is the change from the dormant mind, letting things go as they will, to the progressive mind, i.e. getting things done—wanting to *know*. And the only reason that anyone wants to know something, I suppose, is that that thing affects him. As it becomes evident that the world around him *does* affect him, he will want to know about it, and all of the possible things that could happen to it.

Now ain't science fiction the most pleasing way to do that? Of course, I don't say that all stories passing as science fiction do just that, but when I define science fiction, I define the good story, not the bad. When you define "human" you define the good, or probably more likely, the norm, no? Give sf as much of a break. Why do you like sf, Sam? May I quote you? "It's simply more interesting, more exciting, and more fun . . ." Remember?

Let's leave it that way, huh?

Oh, take the science out. Sell it to 150 million people. But remember, it won't be science fiction you're selling.—*9612 Second Ave., Silver Springs, Md.*

To John L. Magnus Jr. are we indebted for a snapshot of us which scared even us. We passed right through your town on Thanksgiving Day last and refused to stop, all on account of that snapshot. But to get back to you and Crossen. Don't interpret him with 100% absolute literalness. He doesn't mean take all the science out of science fiction. He means let's make the story paramount and the science secondary. He means that pure science can be a dead hand from above, throttling a lot of good stories. A bright young chap named Atheling, speaking of our policy in a fanmag named SKYHOOK, said of us, with fair accuracy, Mines is a self-styled middle-of-the-road-editor who is more interested in a good story than in sociological documents wiring diagrams or works of art. Ease up on the works of art, to which I remain susceptible, but bear down somewhat on the wiring diagrams and you find a common ground. A physics lecture does not make a science-fiction story. And I think that's what Ken meant.

A SNARL FOR SEIBEL

by John Van Couvering

Dear Sam: In spite of the time-consuming work of constructing a suitable philosophy of life (an ambition given a grand goose by your comments on a letter of mine some while back), I occasionally drop my tap dance lessons and Euripides to scan ole Startling.

I'm glad I did. If Seibel (re: TEV Dec. 52) can "defecate" a ream of white paper he is a better fan than I, or even Forry Ackerman, who can do anything. I have never seen a happier boast; it must become one of the great statements of fan history. The man who said that is a man I would like to meet, even though I must have met many fans who were capable of it. Just like that. Another example of man defeating nature. An inversion to baffle Krafft-Ebing. GLORIOUS!

And more: he will offer it for public consumption! This is incredible. Much has been *written*, for the same purpose, that might well be classed as several grades lower on the Scale of Things, but to go directly to the heart of hack-writing . . . to understand its fundamental nature . . . so well, argues a mind of such vast capabilities as to stagger us symbol-ridden postanthropoids. "Excuse me, mum, I feel a science fiction story coming on."

A last observation: in such a physiological fix (we assume Siebel has not relinquished all ties to his phylum) I'd be rather a bit Snarly too.—*Pearl Harbor, TH.*

The Snarler has remained complacent in the face of such subtleties as this choice bit of sniping; even before the hardening process undergone in the Navy he exhibited a

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shell worthy of a starship. I'm afraid you're spoiling him now completely.

QUEST DEFERRED
by Georgina Ellis

Dear Mr. Mines: I'm desperate! Every issue since THE LOVERS there have been raves and more raves about it in TEV. Yup, I'm one who missed it! Please, *please PLEASE!* Will some kind fan send me a copy of that ish?

By the way, I hope THE LOVERS was better than SAIL ON SAIL ON (ugh) or SESTINA OF THE SPACE ROCKET. For that you wasted two pages that could have been used for letters?

Thish—TROUBLED STAR was wonderful. POTEMKIN VILLAGE was good, the two shorts weren't so hot.

And Now the letters!

Bill Deppe—your criticisms of the illos for STAR DICE were reasonable but didn't you think that that passage of the story just begged for an illo, insignificant as it was to the plot?

Ray Thompson—illos on the back, tool! Wonderful! Just like OW and (ugh) Madge.

Poul Anderson (Do I dare address the great man?) Astronomical covers? Drool . . .

George A. Kelly and Mrs. Ames—Shake!

As for the editorial—I have nothing but the highest regard for Mr. Crossen—he's one of my favorite authors (usually), BUT . . . ! Throw the science out of science-fiction? Heaven forbid! Characterization, atmosphere, PEOPLE? Definitely, but leave the science in, even if it is only pseudo!—*1428 Fifteenth St. East, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.*

P.S. I'll welcome and answer all letters.

The deplorable mental state of those unfortunates who missed THE LOVERS is clearly evident in the above. They tend to brood and become depressed and we fear for the consequences if someone doesn't come to their rescue. Any help for Georgina? Also for Sammuel B. Rose of 67 Peachtree Place, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia. He sent us a quarter for the August issue of SS which we had to return because we have no stocks of back numbers.

A MOMENT'S PEACE
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: Ha! Trimmed edges! Haha! After years and years of plaguing on the part of irate fans, you have finally seen the light! The wonderful day hath arrived! I glee. But why, in the name of Ghu, don't you complete it? And you know damned well what I mean—I sure am glad to see SS with trimmed edges, but why not TWS and SPS? And FSM? I can't see why it would inconvenience you any more to do it to the rest . . . why stop at just one mag? I warn you here and now, Sam: we fen never give up—*never!* Now that you have shown us that you'll give in a little bit and make one of your mags with trimmed edges, we will never give you a moment's peace until they're all that way.

But you sure hit the jackpot with your February ish. And I mean just that. I saw the trimmed edges, and jumped with glee. Then I took a look at your author lineup, and jumped twice with glee. Then I read the stories. I'd still be jumping if I had not got tired after a few hours. Gets a li'l bit monotonous after a while, y'know. The shorts were readable again, and the novelet was great. But it was your lead novel that really gave me the impetus I needed to write this missile. Sam, I pull no punches . . . that was really great. But I still have a question to ask you. Why didn't you put that one in SPS? It was pure space opera. It belongs in your space opera mag. I may be reactionary, but I still am nuts about space opera. And TROUBLED STAR shows you why. With all eight tentacles holding zap-guns (you didn't see me at the Chicon, or you'd think twice before you doubted me), I give you a most deserved salute. (Ghod, what a hole *that* made in the ceiling!) But I still think said opus would have been a little bit more apropos in SPS.

Maybe I'm in a happy mood tonight. Why, I dunno . . . after the session of basketball I had this afternoon, and facing a date in a little while in my completely *vaseux* condition, I should be calling you names for making me write this thing. But even the cover struck me right. Maybe I ought to make use of Sutton's favorite word and say I'm 100% flabbergasted. How you can get so much into one ish, I can't see. But at least I have one small gripe the interior illos. And that one has to be small, since even those were passable.

I better shut up. Heaping praise upon praise isn't too good for the editorial ego. I'm fearing a letdown with the forthcoming ishes. But I like Merwin's writing, so let's see before I wrote out the obits. Too bad Merwin has got the editorial bug again. I always liked him a lot better as a writer than as an editor. But then, such is life.

A really good ish, Sam. Great sendoff for 1953.—*410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29, Md.*

Chalk up one satisfied customer, anyway.

SEXES AND SEVENS
by Byron E. Heniford

Dear Sam: That Did It. I've been reading your mag along with many other popular science fiction mags for many years. They've become a really important thing to me. I have read them, liked them, and waited impatiently

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for the next issues to come to the stands. But . . . tonight I read, recoiled, renounced, and now I'm gonna break silence and sound off.

This business of sexy covers is going too dang far. All of us have our particular ideas of what is clean and good, and far be it from me to tell a person his opinion is wrong. However, I find some sex interspersed in the stories and on the covers nice to look at, provided the pictures aren't of some ectoplasmic substance that I can't focus my eyes on.

In your January issue I read through all the stories and enjoyed them and the letters also until I came to the last part of Gerald A. Steward's letter. There something snapped and I said to myself "That did it." It was not his letter that did it. Anyone's letter at that particular time would have done it, I think.

Here's what I think. If one doesn't buy a magazine for what is known to be in it, he should not complain at the cover. We are all of one sex or another. Sex is as much a part of us and our lives and existence as is food, shelter, and clothing. All this jawing about "Put more sex in-Take all of it out" is for the little birds. As my English teacher once said about an essay I wrote, it's much ado about nothing. Leave the mags as they are. We bought them before all this wrangling started and I for one will continue to buy after it has ended. I sincerely hope it's soon. For the last year and a half this fuss has been going on. It's getting old, people. I'll bet that every one who writes concerning this subject (myself included), if taken aside and asked, would admit an interest in sex.

Maybe, maybe I'm just adding fuel to the fire, but I sure feel better.

Put more sex in your mag, or take it all out, but do it yourself and I'll still buy it and still enjoy the stories in it as I always have.

Yours for a weekly SS mag.—*RFD Cameron, Creston, S. C.*

P.S. I'm not asking you to print my letter. You know better than I what is best for your mag, but I am interested in having a couple Fems to write to discuss SF. I already have a few males.

Weekly SS did you say? Egad, anyone know of a good quiet desert island for sale?

FAN AT LARGE
by Louise Lopin

Dear S. M.: I'd like to compliment you on the wonderful job you are doing on SS. Since I started reading it last Feb. it has improved greatly. Better stories, better artwork, a new format, and now trimmed edges.

I enjoyed every bit of TROUBLED STAR in the last issue. POTEMKIN VILLAGE was O.K. The shorts could have been better.

My favorite part of your Mag is T.E.V. However, I believe you should omit religious discussions from its pages. I agree with the girls on the subject of men on the covers.

I've been wondering if there are any Fan clubs in Chicago. I'd love to join.—*744 S. Indep. Blvd., Chicago, Ill.*

P.S. The egoboo is so you'll print this. (Now Sam, you will, won't you?)

We've been in the process of omitting the religious discussions which seem to get nowhere in a hurry. Fan clubs in Chicago? Call Shasta Press and ask for Ted Dikty. I think he's got one.

DIMENSION ALICE
by Lawrence Baidowsky

Dear Sir: Wipe the tears from your eyes. I am back. I did not write to my favorite magazine for over five months because I was busy doing a research paper entitled "The Effect of the Yo-Yo on Mongolian Cultural Patterns." I am also writing a sequel to THE LOVERS entitled "The sex life of the Tse-Tse Fly."

I am writing this to you only to disagree with you on a remark in the Feb. S.S. Brace yourself for a nasty shock. I wish to disagree with the statement that Alice in Wonderland is not Science Fiction. I personally think that it is one of the outstanding science fiction stories and that it is the most well written story of its kind.

First of all, Alice in Wonderland is the first story about another dimension. The author never says that Wonderland is another dimension but the way that Alice gets to Wonderland makes one think of many of today's dimension travel stories. There are many similar points. First she falls down a long dark passage. She feels dizzy. Then she drinks a potion that makes her grow bigger and smaller and finally she bursts into this other world. Sounds familiar.

Another fact is that the land is set in a geometric pattern which latter turns out to be a checker board. In many of the modern stories the land and the inhabitants are geometrically shaped.

Eight years ago, I first read the book. I was always impressed with that little poem entitled "Mimsey Were The Borogroves" or something like that. It always left me with the feeling that it meant something and that if I read it again the signifiance would come to me. I, like many other people, believe that there is more to that poem than just some juggled words.

Lewis Carroll was not a writer of children's stories. He was a scientist and a mathematician. His interest was trigonometry. It seems odd that such a man would write a story such as Alice in Wonderland without any other reason other than to entertain his children.

If the hero of Alice in Wonderland was

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not a little girl but a handsome young man and there was a little more action in the story it would be acceptable to most of today's science fiction fans. It would be much like some of the novels that Henry Kuttner wrote. WELL OF THE WORLDS, THE DARK WORLD, VALLEY OF THE FLAME, and SWORD OF TOMORROW, are just a few of the stories which have the same eerie quality as Alice in Wonderland.

Both Lewis Carroll and Kuttner have a style which brings out the alien and foreign feeling one gets after reading their stories. Maybe Kuttner has a time machine in his back yard which transfers him back a hundred years where he writes under the name of Lewis Carroll. My typewriter is tired now, so I will put it away.—*817 East 179th Street, Bronx 60, N. Y.*

Well, maybe. But I wonder if there's any point in looking for esoteric reasons when the simple ones exist. True, much of what Carroll put in Alice is over small children's heads, but it is more likely that a sophisticated mind finds itself unable completely to come down to a child's level, so that in spite of his intention of writing nonsense to amuse children, Carroll was unable to resist geting in some subtleties which require adult experience to understand. This does not argue ulterior motives, or some secret, semi-mystical message concealed in the language.

As to the coincidences of apparent other dimensions and geometric shapes—it is obvious that our three-dimensional universe invites this kind of thinking, since it appears over and over again in the literature and artifacts of all earth's civilizations. It is actually a pattern rather than a coincidence. However, if it will make you any happier to believe Kuttner is Carroll in reincarnation, you go right ahead.

SEMPER FIDELIS

by, SSGT. James J. Oggerino, U.S. Marines

Dear Sam: You will probably remember me best as the bald headed boy with the severe crew cut. I came up one day and almost overstayed my leave when I saw your receptionist. I'm surprised I haven't seen her on the cover of SS. But more of that later.

I have several things to say.

1. I still maintain that your replies to the letters in TEV are DING HOW, TAK'SAN number one, etc., and more than worth the price of the magazine, especially your reply to that Zoll man.

2. To say that I'm disappointed in the fen would be putting it mildly. After seeing my letter in the September issue I erected an asbestos barricade and firmly entrenched myself behind my desk. I anticipated red hot replies and received none. I can only surmise that I either struck home or the fen have no blood. All, that is, except Marian Cox. To her I have this to say: Honey, if every Marine were to marry a girl like you the next generation would be a race of supermen. Keep pitching.

3. I was completely taken in by the November issue. Poulton (Star Dice) has improved to such an extent that I mistook him for Finlay. If you're not careful Emsh and Schomburg will wind up working for Esquire.

4. To Richalex Kirs, Jim Leake, and Tom Condit: take it easy on the Seven Sided Square of Santa Barbara. For one thing he's out of shotgun range at the moment. After all, he has written (?) a few words here and there that SEEMED to indicate his "hack"-ing cough was improving. Sleepy Seibel is right at home now—all at sea. The result of puncturing his head no doubt.

I have before me the September through January issues of SS. I particularly enjoyed GRAVESONG, THE CHILDREN, OVERDRIVE, and the terrificly improved art work.

Now comes the doity woik. Tell (sigh) Joan that if she sends me a pin up picture, *avec ou sans lunettes*, I will do my best to have her crowned "the telephone girl I would best like to have my lines crossed with/by." As you can see by the enclosed clippings I am not without fame, and in a good position to make good my promises. Soyanara.—*U. S. Marines, Camp Lejeune, N. C.*

Got news for you, James. Since you were here Joan has gone and gotten married. I was there, but I didn't give the bride away. Never said a word. She looked gorgeous. But—still want a picture? I'll get one for you if you do.

Thanks for clipping. It saddened me to see you driven headfirst into the ring floor that way. Maybe you better give up wrestling. What good are scrambled brains? Is that why they call you "The Mad Monk Of The Pyrenees"? (Aside to readers: The Sarge was light-heavy champ of Parris Island before he started punching a typewriter.)

SIGNED, DESPERATE

by Dolores Jennings

Dear Editor: I simply cannot stand it another minute longer! (Don't get mad now!)

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I (boo hoo) missed the issue which contained THE LOVERS!! I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. With all those rave letters, I just must read it! Maybe the boy whose parents wouldn't let him read it, would like to sell his copy?????

Won't someone please have pity on me and sell me a copy??????? I'll pay 50¢ I'm desperate!!!! Please.—*2717 Cherry, Kansas City, Missouri.*

A REASONABLE LEVEL
by I. Barditch

Dear Editor: K. F. Crossen's guest editorial in the Feb. 1953 issue of Startling Stories interested me. I find the views expressed in total disagreement with those that I hold.

(1) Crossen is a man with a mission. My, my, Science Fiction is to be read for enjoyment not to reform poor humanity, (as he and Bradbury think).

(2) I like scientific speculation in the science fiction I read. In fact that is why I read it. Writers, G. O. Smith for example, who know what a laboratory is like and can describe it properly, not only give a reader who has never been in one a correct idea of what one is like, but also draws a nod of approval from those who spend their working hours in such surroundings. A good technical description makes the story vivid and alive. Crossen's appeal for more atmosphere merely means to me more science in the story, for after all, science is the proper atmosphere in a science fiction story.

Anyhow, most steady readers of science fiction generally have a technical background. Obviously a writer who got his science training watching Frankenstein revive the monster Friday night at the Bijou theatre would be against the need for a good technical background in the story.

(3) If I want to read a whodunit or horse opry I'll buy a magazine featuring that type of story. Too bad a lot of hacks think they can substitute ray guns and space ships for six guns and cow-poneys and call it science fiction; and then feel put out if it does not sell as science fiction.

If science fiction must be popularized to please the mob and sell well, it will prove to be a passing fad only. If, however, it remains on a fairly reasonable level it may not attract as many transient readers but it will retain a faithful group that will continue to read it for a long, long time.—*3221 Spaulding Ave., Balto., 15, Md.*

Mr. Barditch also wants to know where he can get a copy of SS with THE HELL-FLOWER in it—to which we reply as always, we cannot supply him with one, but mayhap some gentle reader can. And calling them gentle is stretching the truth out of all recognizable shape.

THE EDITOR'S STOMACH
by Wm. Deeck

Dear Mr. Mines: This is a complaint. Why do you have to take up very good space in your magazine to print the adolescent letters by people (I use the last word loosely) who write in to drivel over your second rate magazine and fight petty wars which is no interest to anybody but themselves. Please excuse the spelling as my father ripped up my dictionary when he heard I was going to write to a Stf periodical. He can't stand me reading that nonsense.

Attention Please!

This Paragraph is for people who do not like nudes on the cover.

I am a good, clean, Healthy American boy (God help me) and I like women undressed. If some people do not like such things and are ashamed of the human body they should do this for me. Ask your newsdealer to look at the magazine and if it has a nude or semi-nude beg him to rip the cover off. Then you can go home without putting the book under your coat.

My remark on the controversy concerning religion. I don't like Religion. So keep your opinions to yourself.

About Captain Future. Let the dead and moldy die.

I do not like Snarly Seibel or Kendall Foster Crossen.

Concerning sex in the stories. Ask the people how they got here. The ones that don't like the sex that is. Drive out all the Puritans that are afraid to look their sons and daughters in the face because they are the product of a sin.

Concerning the people that promise in their letters (so called) that they will send in a manuscript. If they are as bad as the aforementioned letters *DON'T*. If only for the stomach of the poor Editor who has to read them. He has done a lot for this magazine and in a few years will have it readable. (I hope.)

I leave you with this parting thought. Mimsy were the Borogoves.

Do not answer this letter in your inimitable style as I will have to answer it and might become, through some strange quirk of Fate, a babbling and frothing at the mouth fan. Fans: do not write me as your letters will not be opened for I do not wish to argue with anyone.—*8400 Potomac Ave., College Park, Md.*

That last paragraph ruined the whole thing. Just when we thought you were going great guns and were building up to the biggest brawl in the history of TEV! You can't do it. You can't fire a broadside and retreat. You will get letters. We also advise soaking all packages before opening them.

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TWO LITTLE MEN
by Pester and Fester Ember

Dear Editor: We are a brother and sister, married, with one child which has two heads, and we think that you have the *cutest* mag in the field. While we have only been reading stf for 16½ years, this is not the first time that we have ever written a letter to an editor.

We think that all this controversy over sex in the magazine is *darling*, but we can't understand why the fans are so belligerent. And if anyone wants to start a fight, we'll draw up our composite body which is 11 feet tall, 300 lbs., and 54 years old and pen and give 'em what for.

We think all the cute boys are cute and cute girls are cute in the illos, and certainly not too dressed. So if anyone wants to send us some earlier mags we'd appreciate it. We want to catch up soo badly. Send us one complete set of Unknown's; all the Clayton Astoundings you can scrape up, and *early* Air Wonder Tales. In return for this we will enter into correspondence with the sender.

GHOSH WHOW, Sammy Boy, TRIMMED edges. Geewhiz, boyoboy. What'll you slobs think of next (Ha, ha, we were only kidding in case this letter sees print which we don't think it will.)—*614 Norvell St., El Cerrito 8, Calif.*

If anyone recognizes Les and Es Cole of the Elves, Gnomes and Moon Claiming Society under these Halloween masks, the editor disclaims all responsibility. Which is the only way to operate with Elves and Gnomes anyway. At least the bunch that hangs out in our garden. Irresponsible characters, flitting in and out of time and dimensions like crazy.

We are now appalled at the sight of several hundred letters still left, after what we thought was a stern weeding-out process. Too many even to list in our usual mop-up fashion at the end. You know—Joe Gibson plants a plug for the 11th World Science Fiction Convention at Philadelphia—seems to want a dollar from everyone and tries to butter us up by saying we have the only good letter column in the field. All right, so we'll send a buck to Box 2019, Philadelphia, 3, Pa., addressed to the 11th World Science Fiction Convention. Stop pushing. And Marilyn Shrewsbury, Box 1296, Aransas Pass, Texas, says someone gave her a couple copies of SS and TWS and now she's sorry she hasn't been reading them all these years. THE LOVERS, M-mmm. Wants the next convention in Texas, after reading our account of the Chicago brawl. And Barry

[*Turn page*]

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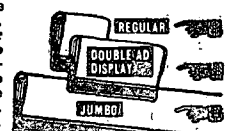

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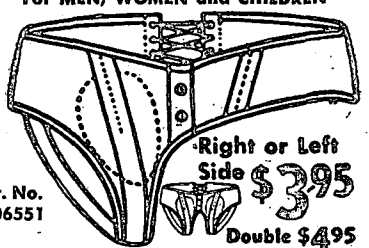

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Miller of 74 Vulcan St., San Franciso, Cal. writes to say he liked DOUBLE MEANING and of course, THE LOVERS. R. H. Drummond, 905 Third Ave., Seattle, Wash., wants to know if we pay our proofreaders in Confederate money. Seems he found a typo or so in TROUBLED STAR. And J. Martin Graetz, 307 So. 52nd Street, Omaha, Nebraska, is curious about a story of ours concerning a missing sculptor. (Peek inside the new WONDER STORY ANNUAL—it's there.)

But there are too many. We'll try to squeeze some more into the next edition of Chloro—uh, Ether Vibrates. Until then . . .

—*The Editor*

P.S. As this issue goes to press we hear that Phil Farmer has won first prize in the Shasta-Pocket Books contest for the best original science fiction novel. First prize is $4000. Working title of the book was I OWE FOR THE FLESH, but don't expect that to stand. Nice going, Phil. We're not surprised!

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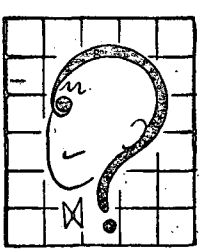

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Science Fiction BOOKSHELF

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

LIMBO by Bernard Wolfe, Random House, New York, 438 pages, $3.50.

WHATEVER else may be—and will be—said about LIMBO as a novel, a tract, or a treatise, the reader is left with the undeniable impression that the author is brilliant. This is the book's strength and weakness at once, for there are times when the author is so busy being brilliant that he forgets he has a story. The sheer number of ideas poured into this volume are overwhelming, but the novel as a

whole would have made a better effect if many of the ideas were not repeated several times. The pot-pourri of related and unrelated ideas is a stew of every thought and notion, apparently, which has crossed the author's mind for years.

The core of Mr. Wolfe's satire is a society founded upon masochism. The young males voluntarily submit to amputation of their arms and legs in support of a mystical philosophy of immobilization. For active work their severed limbs are replaced by highly efficient artificial ones, but in love-making they are more completely immobilized than the most chaste of virgins. Women are the sexual aggressors and their tactics are blunter than the most profligate of today's wolves. To make love to a man the woman removes his artificial arms and legs—this immobilizes him and—you take it from there.

The purpose of the Immobs is to root out

[*Turn page*]

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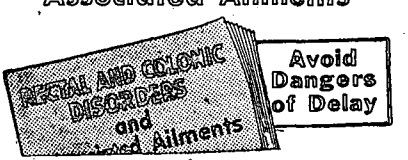

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man's aggressive instincts and it may be suggested that Mr. Wolfe has devised a method which would seem to do it after a fashion but which, even as satire, leaves us considerably unconvinced.

This is only one of the hundreds of satirical points to be found in the novel—it flays surgeons and politicians and psychiatrists and just plain men and not-so-plain women, with equal fervor. It's a five-ring circus going on all at once.

We saw and heard Mr. Wolfe defend his book on the T-V show "Author Meets The Critics" and we thought he made a rather better job of it than the other two critics, of whom one defended and the other attacked.

Science fiction readers will understand this book better than the average innocent book club subscriber; but by the same token, science fiction readers will see more clearly what might have been done here with just a little more discipline.

o

ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS by Lewis Padgett, Gnome Press Inc., New York, 224 pages, $2.75.

IF YOU like Henry Kuttner—and who doesn't?—you should have little difficulty in penetrating the Lewis Padgett disguise to the fun-loving stuff beneath. Our own experience with Padgett stories had been mostly on the cold, dry cerebral level and we were somewhat under the impression that Kuttner used the Padgett byline pretty much exclusively for such stories, writing both fantasy and humor under his real name or one of his other numerous bylines. But apparently this is not so and we are glad to make the correction.

ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS is a gay and wacky collection of stories about an inventor named Galloway Gallegher, who with toothpicks or bobby pins and a couple of stray beer cans can make an atomic gadget guaranteed to raise the earth right out of the solar system.

Granted Gallagher is a fugitive from a straitjacket and that he spends most of his time struggling out of a hangover and wondering what he just invented and what trouble it has gotten him into—this does not seem to detract seriously from the merriment. Five adventures of Gallegher in this volume—a real treat!

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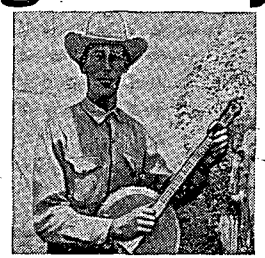

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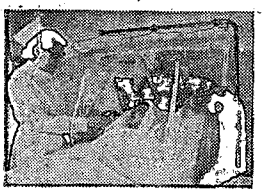

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